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ABSTRACT

Offering information to help parents understand how writing is taught in classrooms that use the 6-Trait Model for writing assessment and writing instruction, this handbook describes the model and how parents can provide the kind of support at home that would make classroom instruction even more effective. Sections of the handbook are: "A Quick Overview and Some Definitions"; "A Student Friendly Scoring Guide"; "A Close-Up Look at Student Writing (Before and After)"; "Tips for Parents: Things You Can Do to Help Your Young Writer"; "Responding to Your Student's Writing"; "For Student Writers: Tips on Making Your Writing Stronger"; and "Answers to Questions Parents Often Ask." A 24-item glossary of common assessment terms and a 20-item annotated list of additional resources are attached. (RS)

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ED 409 588

A Handbook for Parents of 6-Trait Writing Students

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by Vicki Spandel

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

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Ideas Organization Voice

Dear Parent

A Handbook for Parents of 6-Trait Writing Students

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Dear Parent (or Grandparent, Aunt, Uncle, Friend—Whoever!),

Are you looking for ways to . . .

- Help your student writer write *more*?
- Write *better*?
- Get better *grades* in writing?

Would you like to find a way to talk to that student about his or her writing that would not sound like criticism or nagging? A way of coaching a beginning writer that would get *results* (not frowns, groans, shrugs or rolling eyes)? Maybe you'd just like to read your student's thoughtfully revised work and hear yourself say, "Wow! I never knew you could *write* like that!"

We can help. You see, we're looking for those things, too—and over the past ten years or so, we've discovered some answers we'd like to share with you.

In *Dear Parent*, we offer information to help you understand how writing is taught in classrooms that use the 6-Trait Model for writing assessment and writing instruction. Maybe you've wondered where this model came from, whether it really works, and whether you could provide the kind of support at home that would make classroom instruction in the six traits even more effective. The model was developed by writing teachers. Yes, it *does* work, and yes you *can* help. We'll show you how.

What good things can you expect if your child is learning the 6-trait model now? Through 6-trait writing, your student writer can

- Acquire a real sense of what makes some writing so good you can't stop reading—while other writing puts readers right to sleep.
- Write better first drafts.
- Revise with confidence and power—so the second draft is more than just a "neatened up" rehash of draft #1.
- Read with new insight and understanding.
- *Understand* (perhaps for the first time) exactly what teachers are looking for in writing.

Sounds like a lot to promise, doesn't it? But the experience of thousands of teachers in schools across the country who are using the 6-trait model for writing instruction tells us that when students understand what good writing looks like and sounds like, their own writing improves—dramatically.

On the covers of best sellers you'll often see a line that says something like "Don't even *start* this book unless you plan to be up all night." While we don't claim our 6-trait story is quite *that* engaging, we do think the story of how students become strong, confident, skilled writers can be an exciting one.

By the way, since this is a handbook—not a novel—you can browse through the *Table of Contents*, then turn to those sections you find most helpful. If you are new to the 6-trait model, you might want some basic definitions and a little background information. You'll find those right up front. On the other hand, if you already know about this way of teaching writing (maybe you've been to a training session or you have your own copy of the six trait scoring guide already), then by all means skip these background basics, and go right to what interests you—*Tips for Parents*, perhaps, or *Answers to Questions Parents Often Ask*.

Ready to begin? Then, let's talk writing!

Sincerely,

Vicki Spandel

P.S. Student writers and teachers—this handbook is for you, too!

This book is dedicated to parents and other great teachers, and to the students whose work keeps us all going.

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Covers and book design by Annie Vrijmoet

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Section 1

A Quick Overview & Some Definitions

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THE WORD "TRAIT"?

A trait is a quality or characteristic critical to successful performance. The traits of good ice skating, for instance, might be grace, balance, technical and athletic skill, rhythm, speed, and so on.

The traits of good writing include

IDEAS

A clear point, message, theme or story line, backed by important, carefully chosen details and supportive information.

ORGANIZATION

How a piece of writing is structured and ordered.

VOICE

The fingerprints of the writer on the page—the writer's own special, personal style coming through in the words, combined with concern for the informational needs and interests of the audience.

WORD CHOICE

Language, phrasing, and the knack for choosing the "just right" word to get the message across.

SENTENCE FLUENCY

The rhythm and sound of the writing as it is read aloud.

CONVENTIONS

Editorial correctness and attention to any detail a copy editor would review, including

- spelling
- grammar and usage
- capitalization
- paragraph indentation
- punctuation

WHO INVENTED THESE TRAITS?

No one. The six traits are nothing new. They're simply a handy way of talking and thinking about writing. After all, Shakespeare (to cite only one famous example) needed good ideas and details. He organized his plays in a way that kept readers and watchers awaiting the upcoming scene. He wrote with a personal style that is immediately recognizable even to people who have not read a single play in its entirety. Fluency and word choice were—and are—his trademarks. We could make similar comments about numerous renowned writers from any point in history.

That's because the "traits" are a built-in part of what makes writing—*any* good writing, from stories, to newspaper articles to technical manuals—successful. So, while teachers have not created the traits per se, what they *have* developed is a language, a vocabulary, for describing these traits and teaching them to young writers. This language, sometimes called *criteria*, is written into a document called a "Scoring Guide." (These terms and many others are explained in the glossary.) *A Student Friendly Scoring Guide*, one developed especially for use by students in grades 3 through 12, appears on pages 5–11.

CRITERIA = LANGUAGE

So what?

Is the language used to describe good (or weak) writing really that important? Yes, it is.

Here's why: Did you ever receive a grade on a piece of your own writing and wonder why you got that particular grade? Maybe you wondered what the teacher was thinking. What exactly had you done well? Or not so well? What does a grade such as B+ or B- or C- signify anyway? If you're like most people, you didn't always know. Sometimes, you probably felt just fine about your grade (everybody likes to receive an A), but you may have wondered whether you honestly deserved it, or had just gotten lucky.

Now let's imagine that you got specific comments like these (maybe—if you were fortunate—you did!):

Your introductory sentence leads me to think you're going to write about football. I need some help linking this to health food.

I'm could just picture wobbly Uncle Fred on the water skis. I almost felt the impact of the fall!

You have one good argument for your position, but in this second paragraph you rely more on opinion than evidence.

Read this aloud and I think you'll notice that most of your sentences begin with "I."

Your voice seems especially courteous and professional in this final paragraph. I like the tone here.

That phrase—*welcome as gnats in the ears*—really helped me tune in to your feelings.

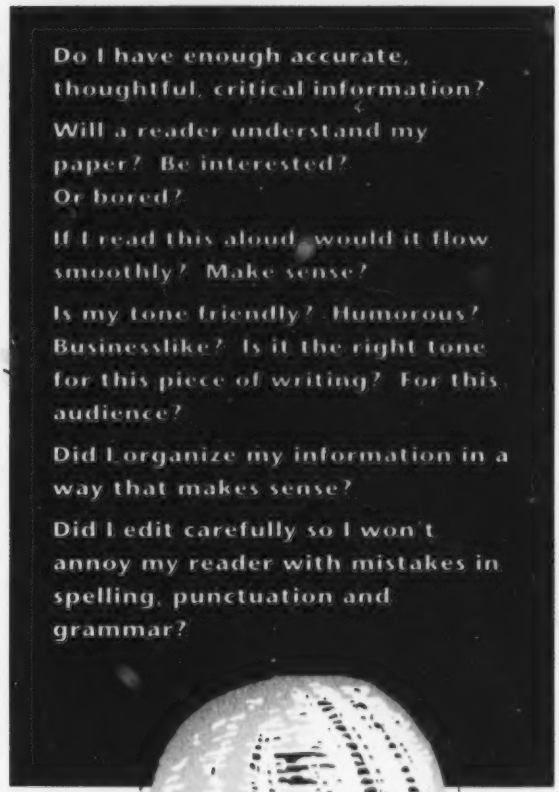
Explicit language takes the mystery away. Suddenly, voilà! Students *get* it. This means that next time they can make the good parts even better, and take steps to get rid of problems in their writing.

Wait a minute . . . Don't most students already KNOW how to revise?

Unfortunately, no. What many students call "revision" involves only a few little "surface" changes, such as

- Making the paper longer
- Printing it in another font (typeface) on the word processor so it *looks* longer
- Making it neater
- Adding a title
- Fixing the spelling

These changes might make a paper look better, and might even make it easier to read, but in truth, they are just superficial changes—like dusting the furniture when what you really needed to do was add a room to the house. Real revision isn't just tidying up to make a document look better. It's much BIGGER than this. It requires thoughtful analysis in which a writer asks himself/herself questions like these:


Do I have enough accurate, thoughtful, critical information?
Will a reader understand my paper? Be interested? Or bored?
If I read this aloud, would it flow smoothly? Make sense?
Is my tone friendly? Humorous? Businesslike? Is it the right tone for this piece of writing? For this audience?
Did I organize my information in a way that makes sense?
Did I edit carefully so I won't annoy my reader with mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar?

How will students know what questions to ask? That's where the six traits come in. (Have a look at the *Student Friendly Scoring Guide* that follows this section and you'll see what we mean.)

How are the traits used?

The six traits are used in several ways, including

1. Statewide or districtwide assessment

In many places, state or district level assessment is based on the 6-trait model. This means that your child might have his or her writing read and assessed across these six key qualities; he or she would then receive six separate scores, one per trait. Often, two teacher-raters look at each piece of writing, so each student writer receives six scores from each rater—12 scores altogether. The result is a kind of performance profile that tells the writer how successful that particular piece of writing seemed in the eyes of those readers who assessed it.

Such information, collected over a large sample of writers, can help a school or district plan a writing program that helps student writers succeed.

NOTE

Some districts or states have combined the original six traits in various ways to create their own assessment models. For instance, voice and fluency might be combined to form one trait called, say, "style." Even when this happens, though, the people who score the papers will usually be looking for the same basic characteristics described in this handbook.

How much do state or district assessment scores tell me about my student writer's overall writing skills?

Such scores are an indicator—an important clue—but they do not tell us all we need to know. Think of it this way: A photograph shows how a person looked at the time the photo was taken—maybe radiant, maybe windblown. A photograph cannot, however, accurately reflect how a person looks *all* the time, or even how she *usually* looks. It may or may not show her looking her very best. Single-performance assessments are a little like photographs. They capture *some* important information. A writing assessment might point out a special skill no one spotted before, for instance.

But to get a really accurate, complete picture of any one person's writing, we would need to look at multiple samples over a long period of time. A single photograph can never tell as much as a whole photo album, or even a 10-minute video. This is why many teachers have begun to rely on portfolios, collections of student work, for this "bigger picture."

2. Classroom Assessment

Many teachers use the traits to assess writing performance in the classroom. They may do pre- and post-assessments to determine how much students grow as writers during a school year or grading period. In between, student writers may be assessed on all six traits for some assignments, and on selected traits for others. For example, let's say students are writing narrative accounts of a memorable experience. For such writing, every trait is probably important.

For another assignment in science, students may be writing a summary of how photosynthesis works. For this assignment, a teacher could decide that the most important traits to assess are

Ideas

Does the student's writing show a clear understanding of the concept of photosynthesis, and does the student present that concept clearly and completely, referring to all important details and steps?

Word Choice

Does the student use accurate language to describe the process of photosynthesis? Does he/she use all words correctly?

Conventions

Are specific biological terms spelled correctly? Do proper punctuation and grammar make the piece easy to read? Are proper nouns capitalized?

3. Students can learn the traits, too!

Student writers who learn the six traits through classroom instruction and who use them in revising their work find their writing is stronger, more focused, and more effective.

How do students learn the traits?

They assess! Like teachers, students learn the in's and out's of writing by discussing and assessing writing of all kinds and forms—good and bad. They also practice revising, often working on someone else's writing first, then their own. It all begins with a *Student Friendly Scoring Guide*. A scoring guide is a summary of all six traits, with numbers to indicate levels of performance. On a five-point scale, the numbers have these meanings:

1—BEGINNING

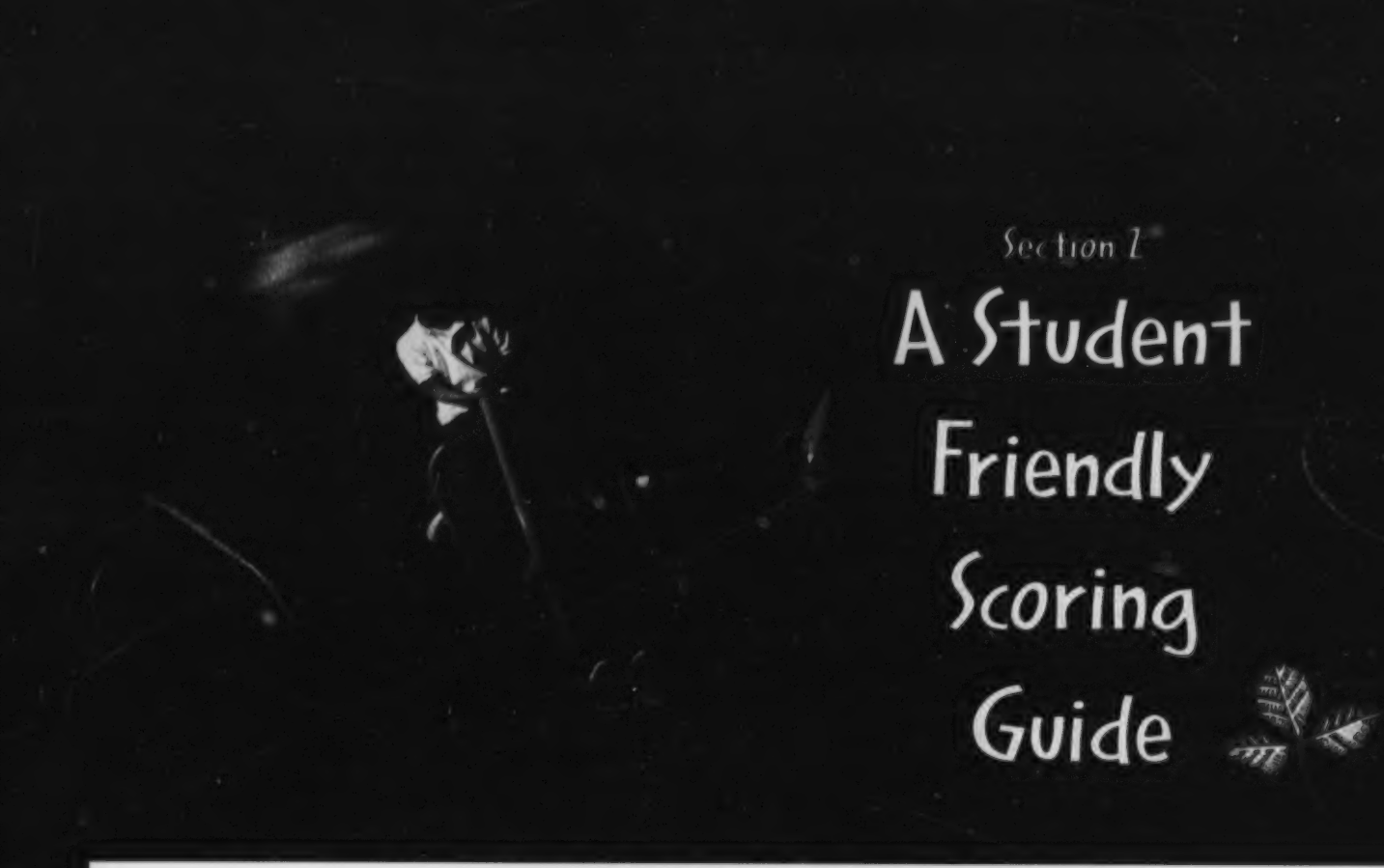
Searching, exploring
Getting something down on paper

3—DEVELOPING

Taking control
Acting on the possibilities
Knowing where it's all headed
Presenting support for the main idea
Getting the big picture

5—LANDING IT!
WRITING WITH PURPOSE AND CONFIDENCE

Making it individual
Getting very selective with details
Getting choosy about words and phrases
Fine tuning—knowing how each piece fits with the bigger whole
Knowing the audience and speaking right to them



Section 1

A Student Friendly Scoring Guide

IDEAS
ORGANIZATION
VOICE
WORD CHOICE
SENTENCE FLUENCY
CONVENTIONS

Want more detail on what makes writing work, trait by trait? Have a look at the *Student Friendly Scoring Guide* that follows. Think of Level 1 is a beginning point. Level 3—about half-way home! Level 5 is the goal your student writer is aiming for on each trait. By the way, in assessment, scores of 2 or 4 may also be assigned. A 2 is just a little stronger than a 1 but not quite as strong as a 3, while a 4 is halfway between a 3 and 5. As you read through the criteria, notice the growth, point to point, like stepping stones to success.

IDEAS

Ideas are the heart of the message. They reflect the purpose, the theme, the primary content, the main point, or the main story line of the piece. When ideas are strong, the writing is rich with detail, original and thoughtful, highly focused and clear, and substantive. In other words, it says something; it doesn't just meander or list ideas randomly. It doesn't bore the reader with trivia, repetition, or unnecessary information.

1—JUST BEGINNING

Someone else might have trouble figuring out what I'm trying to say.

I might not know enough yet about this topic to write.

My details are vague: "It was fun and stuff."

I'm still thinking on paper. I'm looking for an idea.

I'm not sure what my topic is . . . OR . . . maybe my topic is too big: "All about Earth."

3—ON MY WAY—READY FOR SERIOUS REVISION

A reader would understand my MAIN idea. I could use more information, though.

Some details are important and interesting: "She always wore non-matching socks." Other details are too general or are things everyone already knows: "She was nice." "It was a July day in Arizona. The weather was warm."

My topic is still too big: "Weather" "World Peace" "All About Computers"

I think a reader would still have some important questions: "So—do computers actually *think*—or not?" "Does global warming affect weather?" "What actually caused the hot air balloon to crash?"

5—THAT'S IT! FOCUSED, CLEAR, SPECIFIC, CONCISE

My writing brims with details that hold a reader's attention. The main point is very focused and easy to understand.

A reader would learn something reading this.

I showed what was happening ("The wildly spiraling tornado aimed straight for our barn") rather than just telling ("It was scary").

My topic is small and focused: "What to do when a tornado hits."

Interesting tidbits ("You hear a tornado before you see it") keep my readers reading; no one will get bored and doze off reading this.

I included what was important (whether a tornado can *really* pick up a house) and left out trivia and details not related to my topic (names of hurricanes since 1900).

I could easily answer the question: What is the point of this paper or this story?

QUICK CHECK FOR REVISION:

___ I chose a small topic I can manage.

___ I have ALL the information I need to write.

___ The main idea/story in my paper is:
_____ (I *can* fill in the blank!)

___ The details I chose will hold a reader's attention. They are NOT obvious or boring.

___ I left out things that are not that important.

___ I waited 2 days and re-read this. It still seemed clear.

___ I gave this to someone else to read. I answered any important questions he/she had.

ORGANIZATION

Organization is the internal structure of the piece. Think of it as being like an animal's skeleton, or the framework of a building under construction. Organization holds the whole thing together. That's why it's such an important trait. Many students say it is also one of the hardest traits to master. Maybe so. Isn't it hard sometimes to organize your room? Attic? Garage? Closet? Or to organize your time? A party? A trip? Organizing your writing is much the same. You have to ask, *Where do I begin? What comes next? After that? Which things go together? Which can be left out? How do I tie up the loose ends?*

1—JUST BEGINNING

My writing doesn't have a real shape or direction yet.

I'm not sure where to begin or where to go next.

What goes with what?

How does my information connect to the main idea?

Ideas seem jumbled, scrambled. It's just a list of stuff.

How do I end this? Get me out!

3—ON MY WAY—READY FOR SERIOUS REVISION

It's partly smooth, partly bumpy. I'm *starting* to know where I'm going. You won't feel lost if you pay attention!

I have a beginning, but I'm not sure it's a grabber. Readers—*are you there?*

Usually, you can see how I got from point to point, but you might need to make some leaps.

Most things are in the right spot. Some things might need to be moved.

I have a conclusion. It might not be as punchy or insightful as I'd like.

5—THAT'S IT! CLEAR AND COMPELLING, EASY TO FOLLOW!

I give my reader a strong sense of direction. The structure of my paper helps make the meaning clear.

My opening gets a reader's attention and gives a clue about what's coming.

Everything seems in order. You won't feel like reshuffling the deck.

I've made the connections so clear you'll see exactly how details link to the main idea.

The pacing is just right. I sped along when there wasn't much to tell, but slowed down when details and closeups were needed.

I didn't stop suddenly or drag the paper out. I ended in a good spot—and with a good thought.

QUICK CHECK FOR REVISION:

___ My opening is strong. It sets up the whole paper.

___ It's clear where I'm headed, but I don't think it's TOO obvious.

___ Things go together. No one will say, "What's THAT doing in this paper?!"

___ The writing builds to a main point, or to a most important part.

___ I did NOT start to say one thing, then go off on a tangent.

___ When I had told my reader enough, I stopped writing.

___ My conclusion wraps things up well.

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VOICE

Writing that's alive with voice is engaging, hard to put down; voiceless writing is a chore to read. Voice is the personal imprint of the writer on the page, and so is different with each writer. Edgar Allan Poe does not sound like Ralph Waldo Emerson or Maya Angelou. Roald Dahl does not sound like Erma Bombeck. Carl Sagan does not sound like Dave Barry. Each voice is unique. Voice is part concern for the reader (*Are you getting this? Are you still with me?*), part enthusiasm for the topic, and part personal style. Voice also differs somewhat with purpose and audience. A writer may use one voice in a note to a friend, another in a story to be read aloud to 60 listeners, and another still in a business letter or memo.

1—JUST BEGINNING

I don't feel engaged by this topic, so how can I get a reader interested?

If you didn't know, I'm not sure you could tell who wrote this. There isn't that much of me in here.

This writing might be flat, but it feels safe. I'm not taking any risks here.

To tell the truth, this topic bores me. I guess it shows.

I've hidden behind a lot of generalities: "School is important." "We should all get an education." "War is brutal." I've said what millions of others have said. It's not personal or individual.

3—ON MY WAY—READY FOR SERIOUS REVISION

I hear myself in spots. My voice booms through for a moment here and there—then fades to a whisper.

I don't think you'll fall asleep, but it isn't strong enough yet to make you laugh, cry, or pound the table.

I feel OK about this topic. I might like it more if I knew more or connected it to my own experience.

Sometimes I'm speaking to the reader. Other times, I don't even think about having a reader.

My writing is right on the edge of being funny, scary, dramatic or strong. I just can't seem to get there.

5—THAT'S IT! IT'S ME! INDIVIDUAL, EXPRESSIVE, ENGAGING ... HEAR IT?

You could tell this was mine if you knew me. It's personal and unique—like fingerprints.

I have put my personal stamp on this paper.

I'm speaking right to the reader. I picture my reader. I imagine how he/she will feel reading this.

I want the reader to feel what I feel, to see what I see.

Because I'm fascinated by this topic, my reader will be curious and involved, too. It's a journey of discovery for both of us.

The tone (humorous, serious, businesslike, friendly) and style (casual and chatty or formal and professional) are just right for my topic and for my audience.

Good writing always has strong and appropriate voice.

DONALD MURRAY, A WRITER TEACHES WRITING

QUICK CHECK FOR REVISION:

___ I like this topic.

___ I am enjoying the writing. I like sharing this story/information.

___ I have a good idea who my audience is. I thought about that audience as I was writing.

___ The tone of this paper is just right—funny, light, serious, businesslike, authoritative, etc.

___ This sounds like me. I read it aloud or had someone read it aloud to me. I hear my own voice in here.

___ I said some things that were original, or I said them in my own, original way.

WORD CHOICE

Careful writers seldom settle for the first word that comes to mind. They constantly search for the "just right" word or phrase that will help a reader get the point. Take the word *big*. This word seems to convey a definite meaning. But does it? Just think of the many different meanings you could create if you wrote . . . *Massive, enormous, considerable, numerous, momentous, prominent, conspicuous, or self-important* . . . each is slightly different. Mark Twain once said that the difference between the right word and the almost right word was the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.

1—JUST BEGINNING

I can just picture my reader saying, "What did you mean by this?"

These words are too general and vague to paint pictures: "Something neat happened." "It was great." "She was special." "We had fun." "We liked to do things and stuff."

Some of my words are mistaken—oops, I mean *misused*.

I use the same words over and over; it's just those same words, over and over. They're words, but they're the same. And I use them over and over until my paper is over.

3—ON MY WAY—READY FOR SERIOUS REVISION

These words get the general message across. But I don't see many "quotable moments." I'm not stretching here.

I'm settling for basic meaning. It's clear. But it could use imagination, flair, pizzazz.

Did I write to impress? Well, I *may* have engaged in the practice of jargonistic over-inflated expressionism for the purpose of creating an impression. Did it facilitate your engagement—or generate decline in your attention quotient?

Instead of settling for "The sun set" I could have said "The sun sagged into the outstretched arms of the trees."

Tired clichés are like little anchors in my paper: "Bright and early," "Quick as a flash." A few original phrases—"Freeze drying is a sort of mummification of the 90s"—breathe life into the text.

5—THAT'S IT! FRESH, ORIGINAL, PRECISE. EVERY WORD COUNTS.

I searched. I stretched. I found just the right words and phrases to make my meaning clear.

Look at my energetic verbs: *leaped, raged, tumbled, flailed, quaked, moped, launched, pitched, shrieked, wheedled, nudged.*

Some words or phrases will linger in your memory . . . "The pond was alive with frogs." "I went headfirst into murky, shadowy waters." "Not everything about chocolate covered marshmallows is sweet."

The words I've chosen will help my reader picture what I'm talking about, and understand my message.

Not a word is misused. Every word carries its weight.

I've considered my reader, and used words that will be appealing, informative, and understandable. You might even learn a new word or two reading this.

No clichés, no redundancy—except for effect. I rejected jargon in favor of language that speaks to readers.

QUICK CHECK FOR REVISION:

___ This language is clear and easy to understand.

___ It's also precise (I didn't say, "They danced poorly" when I meant "They butchered the tango").

___ I could circle at least three strong verbs if you asked.

___ When I read this through, I get a picture in my mind.

___ I did NOT repeat words unless it was necessary.

___ I tried to make things clear and interesting. I was NOT trying to impress people with my BIG vocabulary.

Don't say dog. Say cocker spaniel. Don't say house. Say cottage. Or vicarage. Or split-level. Or shack. Avoid general statements filled with lackluster parts of speech. Be concrete wherever you can. It's not a fighter plane; it's an F16. . . . A mist that "curls" around a boat is more intriguing than one that simply "covers" it. . . . A piano that sits in the middle of a room "glowing from a rubdown of cactus oil" is a piano I won't soon forget.

DAVID L. CARROLL, A MANUAL OF WRITER'S TRICKS

SENTENCE FLUENCY

Fluent writing is graceful, varied, rhythmic—almost musical. It's easy to read aloud. Sentences are well built. They *move*. They vary in structure and length. Each seems to flow right out of the one before. Strong sentence fluency is marked by logic, creative phrasing, parallel construction, alliteration, and word order that makes interpretive reading feel simple and natural.

1—JUST BEGINNING

This paper is hard to read aloud, even with practice.

As I read, I find myself stopping, going back, re-checking the meaning.

I'm having a hard time telling where one sentence ends and the next begins.

Help! Some of these sentences don't make sense.

All my sentences begin with the same two or three words.

I've got a problem! Either (1) everything is strung together in one endless "sentence," OR (2) many choppy little sentences make for a bump-bump-bumpy ride.

If I read this paper aloud, I'd need to do a lot of oral editing (putting words in, taking words out) to make it clear for a listener.

3—ON MY WAY—READY FOR SERIOUS REVISION

It's pretty easy to read aloud if you take your time, but I wish it sounded smoother in places.

I've noticed something about my sentences. My sentences are all about the same length. Maybe I could combine some. Maybe I could shorten others.

I could use some connecting phrases—*When this happened . . . Later . . . . Another thing to consider . . . On the other hand . . . For example . . . Nevertheless . . . However* —to show how ideas are linked.

These sentences are readable and clear, but wordy! I should cut some deadwood.

Here and there, I really like the way I strung words together. It's smooth—easy to read.

5—THAT'S IT! SMOOTH, RHYTHMIC, EASY TO READ. IT JUST FLOWS ALONG.

These sentences almost sing. It is very easy to read this paper aloud with lots of inflection (expression).

Some sentences are long and stretchy, some short and snappy.

Sentence beginnings vary and show how ideas connect with phrases like . . . *As a matter of fact, Next, On the other hand, Taking a closer look at the evidence, Looking at it from a different perspective, To cite another argument, In addition*, etc.

Excess baggage has been cut. Every sentence is lean and clean.

QUICK CHECK FOR REVISION:

___ I read this paper aloud or had someone read it to me. I like how it sounds.

___ As I scan down the page, I see that sentences DO begin in different ways.

___ Some sentences are much longer than others.

___ If I used dialogue, I read all parts aloud to see if they sounded natural.

___ My sentences are NOT wordy.

CONVENTIONS

Almost anything a copy editor would deal with comes under the heading of conventions. This includes spelling, punctuation, grammar and usage, capitalization, and paragraph indentation. It does not include such things as handwriting or neatness. Though appearance is important, it is not the same thing as correctness, so it is important not to assess them together. In a strong paper, the conventions are handled so skillfully, the reader doesn't really need to think of them—any more than you normally think to look for spelling errors in a textbook or newspaper. (You might find some if you look carefully, of course, but they're rare.)

1—JUST BEGINNING

My editing is not under control yet. You might need to read once to decode, then again to focus on meaning.

Speling errer our commun, evin on simple werdz.

I sometimes, used, "punctuation," where it, wasnt needed and in other place's I forgot to put it in

Or I used the wrong punctuation??

i've got capiTAl lETTERs scaTtered around, or else i forgot to use them at all.

I haven't got the hang of paragraphs yet. When do you indent again? After each sentence? Each page?

The truth is, I haven't spent much time editing this paper.

3—ON MY WAY—READY FOR SERIOUS EDITING

I took a look. I made corrections. But some bothersome mistakes still need cleaning up before I'm ready to publish.

You won't find BIG GLARING errors—the kind that make it hard to understand what I mean.

Little hard-to-spot errors, though? Yes, you'll find sum—uh, make that *some*.

Spelling is correct on most simple words. I may have small errors on harder words. Is it *broccoli* or *brocoli*??

Sentences and most proper nouns begin with capitals.

I used paragraphs. Do they ALL begin in the right spots? I need to check.

Minor problems with grammar or usage could make a careful reader pause now and then. Subjects and verbs agree, but I'm not always sure about *who* and *whom* or *me, I* and *myself*. And what about *there, their* and *they're*? *Two, too* and *to*?

My paper is readable, but it's a draft shy of "ready" when it comes to editing.

5—THAT'S IT! EDITED, POLISHED, CORRECT. BEAUTIFUL!

There are so few errors in this paper, you'll have to hunt for them!

It would be a snap to get this ready to publish.

I have used capitals correctly.

My spelling is accurate; I have checked words I did not know.

Paragraph indentations clearly show where discussion of a new topic begins.

Punctuation is used correctly, making each sentence easy to read and interpret.

Grammar and usage are correct and consistent.

My conventions are as formal as they need to be, given the purpose and audience for this writing.

QUICK CHECK FOR EDITING:

- ___ I waited at least two days, then read my paper slowly word for word to check for errors.
- ___ I read this paper both silently and aloud so I could listen AND look for errors.
- ___ I used editing tools: dictionary, handbook, spell checker on the computer, etc.
- ___ I got editing help (from a teacher, parent or friend) if I needed it.
- ___ I checked from the bottom up for spelling errors (so I couldn't read too fast and miss some).

Section 3

A Close-Up Look At Student Writing— Before & After

Now that you've had a chance to explore the criteria in the *Student Friendly Scoring Guide*, let's look at some examples of student writing both before and after revision. This is the work of a grade 7 student, and it's her first draft—the "before" version.

Ann

I have a friend whose name is Ann. Ann is special. She is the greatest friend. She is fun and alot of fun to be with. She has the best personality in the world and does lots of great things with me like sports and spending the night.

Ann and I have been friends since third grade. We became friends right away. She wore these really neat clothes that were not like the other kids clothes.

I like Ann because she likes me and watches out for me. We have fun at each others houses and we like each others families too. I hope we are friends forever!!

Suppose you were to assess this piece of writing on the six traits. What scores would you give it?

__ Ideas
__ Voice
__ Organization
__ Word Choice
__ Sentence Fluency
__ Conventions

Want to see how teachers scored it? Read on.

Teamwork!

Scoring a piece of writing like this one can be one of the most useful writing activities for you and your student writer. You could read the piece aloud, list any strengths or problems you see, discuss what you would do to revise if it were your writing, then score it individually and compare your scores to see how closely you agree.

Here are the **teachers' scores:**

3 Ideas
3 Organization
2 Voice
2 Word Choice
2 Sentence Fluency
4 Conventions

Teachers' Comments:

Fairly clear, but very general.

We find out Ann is "special" and that she has "neat clothes." We still couldn't pick her out in a crowd.

The words, like the ideas, are vague: *great, a lot of fun, neat, best personality.* These words are so overused they've lost all power.

Too redundant! Notice how many times this writer uses *fun.*

She sounds bored—as if she's hurrying to finish the paper.

It sounds like a eulogy for a deceased relative the writer did not know very well.

This writer doesn't take time to show Ann "in action" so we could see for ourselves what a "great friend" she is. Not much voice.

Many sentences begin with *She, We* or *I.* There is almost no variety.

Errors are not serious, but it's too simple (small words!) and short to let this writer show off the conventions a seventh grader should know.

Student Revision of "Ann"

Here's the same paper, revised by a student working with a student partner and using the traits as a guide to revision. See if you think it is stronger.

Ann (revised)

Ann has been my friend since third grade. I know the moment she walked into the classroom with her short haircut and Cubs sweatshirt that we were destined to be friends. She shared everything with me from Day 1—her lunch (including Twinkies), her smile, even the secrets to good grades in math. When it came time to choose sides for the softball team, Ann (the captain, naturally) picked me first, even though we both knew I couldn't hit a floating balloon with a tennis racquet, much less hit a softball to the outfield. This taught me something. Loyalty and friendship are more important than being good in sports. I felt like a winner for the first time in my life.

Loyalty doesn't just mean liking someone, either. It means sticking up for them. Now that I'm in 7th grade, a lot of kids tease me about my braces. Face it. They're ugly, and during lunch, food gets stuck in them and it's disgusting. Ann has this way of sticking up for me, though. She will look kids right in the eye as if she is daring them to make a rude remark. That is usually all it takes. She doesn't even have to say a word. They know not to push it.

I used to think people became friends because they liked doing the same things. It isn't quite like that. What I've discovered is that when you really like being with someone, everything you do is fun. Ann and I go to the movies, for instance, and then pretend we're Siskel and Ebert doing the review at the end. Ann is a "thumbs up" kind of person, but I'm "thumbs down" about half the time. Maybe I'm just naturally grouchier and more critical than she is. We also cook together a lot. We like making dinners for our families, and they are usually good enough sports to eat what we make. Our specialty is spaghetti. Ann likes it spicy with plenty of onions, so I'm working on liking it that way too.

I'm only 13, so it's hard to imagine who my friends will be when I'm 60 or 70 years old. But I hope Ann is one of them. We'll go on a European tour where you ride one of those tour buses during the day and then shop and eat interesting food at night. Ann will watch out for me if any of the other tourists make fun of my clothes, we will find out what spaghetti is really supposed to taste like, and Ann will give every country a thumbs up. Maybe I will, too.

How would you score this revised version?

___ Ideas
___ Organization
___ Voice
___ Word Choice
___ Sentence Fluency
___ Conventions

Do your scores look different this time compared to the scores you gave the first draft? The teachers' scores were *much* different. Here are the things they noticed (compare their comments to your thoughts and responses about the revised version):

Teachers' Comments

This is an "Ann" we feel as if we know!

In this wonderful revision, Ann takes on form and substance, like a figure stepping out of the shadows.

It's easy in this version to picture the two friends together.

Wonderful examples—choosing sides for softball, cooking spaghetti with lots of onions, and hopping on the tour bus. Very specific.

Good word choice—*the secrets to good grades, couldn't hit a floating balloon, I felt like a winner, a thumbs up kind of person.* This kind of phrasing is fresh and fun to read.

Sentences were smooth and varied. Almost every sentence begins differently!

Strong voice! This writer seems to enjoy telling us about Ann, and I enjoyed reading it.

Good conventions. It was easy to read. Good proofreading and editing!

Even though the piece was about Ann, it's the writer who is most clearly revealed: her sense of humor and rare sense of irony are unusually mature!

Here are the teachers' scores:

5 Ideas
5 Organization
5 Voice
4 Word Choice
5 Fluency
5 Conventions

Did you score the revised version much higher, too? Your student writer (with your help) can make the same kinds of changes on his or her own first drafts. One good way to plan revision is to score a draft together, then brainstorm ways to make the writing stronger. You could do that right now, or—if you'd like a little more practice, just to warm up—you could try your hand at revising this 5th grade paper. Follow these steps:

Steps to Revision

- First, one of you reads the paper aloud to the other.
- Second, score it, using the *Student Friendly Scoring Guide*.
- Third, brainstorm ways to revise. You may want to jot down a list of your ideas.
- Finally, rewrite it, using your revision ideas list. And if you like—score it again to see how much improvement you've made.

REMEMBER, YOU CAN FOLLOW THESE SAME STEPS *WITH YOUR OWN WORK*.

Ready? Here's Draft #1 of "My Bike."

My bike is big. It is red. It is cool. I got it for my birthday. it can go fast. I like my bike. It has five speeds. It is neat.

__ Ideas
__ Voice
__ Organization
__ Word Choice
__ Sentence Fluency
__ Conventions

Teachers' Comments

A good beginning piece.

It has the promise of some good ideas to come.

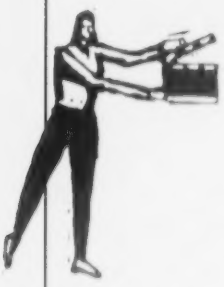
We don't have enough details to know this writer or to feel any reaction.

Words like "cool" and "neat" are so general that they do not help a reader picture the bike.

This reads as if it had been written in the last five minutes before the start of a favorite TV program.

Here's the paper following a few changes by two fifth grade writers working as a team, and using the *Student Friendly Guide*:

My Bike (Grade 5 revision)



I'm barely five feet tall, so when I got an 18-inch mountain bike for my birthday I felt like I was sitting on top of the world. For one whole day, I was scared to even get on without someone hanging onto me. But that wasn't getting me anywhere so I got up my courage and hoped on. That first time, I balanced clear to the end of the drive way, but when I tried to waive to my Dad, the person who bought me the bike, I went flying. "Don't talk and drive," my dad said.

My bike is fire engine red. Dad says, "They will see you coming for sure!" It isn't totally red anymore, though. My very clumsy brother who can't walk through a doorway without injurying himself outragiously splashed white paint on it, so now it looks like some strange modern art, but at least all the kids know which bike is mine. My dad calls it "distinctive". At least I don't have to scratch my name in the bumper like my brother did to his poor bike.

My bike has five speeds, but I don't use them all. I don't want to get going too fast. Call me chicken but that's how it is. Dad says one day I'll be climbing a big hill and I'll be glad for the extra help. For right now I'm just concentrating on learning to turn without losing my balance. My favorite person to ride with is Aunt Patsy. She is 32 but she still rides bikes. She goes way, WAY faster than I do and she can stop as fast as a rodeo horse. When she rides, her long hair blows out behind her like a flag.

Do you have a bike? If not, think about getting one. You might not be lucky enough to have an Aunt Patsy to ride with but you can have alot of fun just by yourself.

Teachers' Scores

First draft:

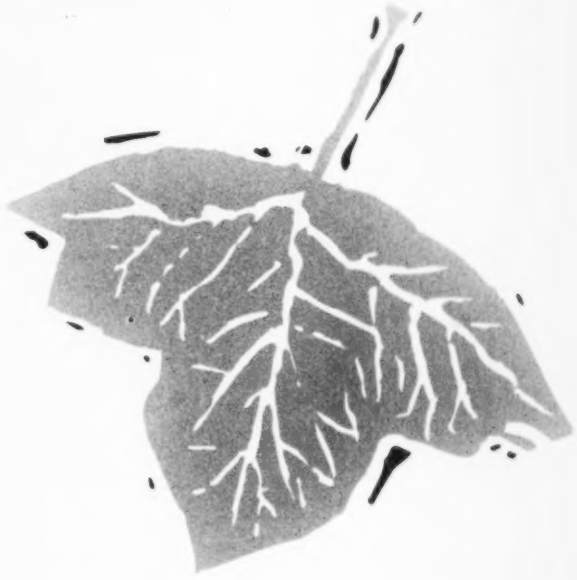
1 Ideas
2 Organization
1 Voice
2 Word Choice
3 Sentence Fluency
3 Conventions

Revision:

5 Ideas
5 Organization
5 Voice
5 Word Choice
5 Sentence Fluency
5 Conventions

Did you agree? Even if your scores do not match, odds are you see the revised version as livelier, more detailed, and more interesting. The tone is enthusiastic. The language is much stronger and more specific (*fast as a rodeo horse, injuring himself outrageously, Call me chicken, blows out behind her like a flag*), and the paper is well organized. There were minor errors, but they were not considered serious enough to keep this paper from receiving a 5 in conventions.

How about your own revision? Did you find ways to make the writing stronger? For tips on how you can help your student writer—and what students themselves can do—check out the following two sections.



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Section 4

Tips for Parents

Things You Can Do to Help Your Young Writer

The reading-writing connection—

Do you like to read to your child? The reading-writing connection is powerful. So, why not take advantage of it? As writer-teacher Mem Fox reminds us . . .

Powerful writers and powerful speakers have two wells they can draw on for that power: one is the well of rhythm; the other is the well of vocabulary. But vocabulary and a sense of rhythm are almost impossible to "teach" in the narrow sense of the word. So how are children expected to develop a sense of rhythm or a wide vocabulary? By being read to, alive, a lot!

MEM FOX, RADICAL REFLECTIONS

Read.

Read aloud often—and from many different kinds of texts, not *just* books. Read

books
short stories
picture books
poems
cook books
pamphlets
brochures
how-to manuals
newspaper articles
journal articles
letters
greeting cards

. . . and *anything else in print. Continue to read aloud even after your children are old enough to read to themselves.*

Take turns.

Be the reader sometimes. Other times, let your child read aloud to you. Reading aloud builds comprehension skills, a sense of what a sentence is, fluency, punctuation skills, sense of voice, and much more. It is VERY important for the child sometimes to be the reader. Show your child how to be an active listener, too. If you do not understand a word, ask about it. If the plot of a story takes an unexpected turn, comment on it. Let your response show.

Introduce children to different genres (types of literature), authors, writing styles. Choose books with wonderful language, vocabulary, stories, and information . . . There is also much evidence to show that reading aloud positively impacts vocabulary growth and comprehension. If children read a million words a year . . . they will likely gain the meaning of one thousand new words from context. [We must] encourage parents to continue reading aloud.

REGIE ROUTMAN,
LITERACY AT THE CROSSROADS

Read what you love and enjoy.

That way, your love of reading will shine through. Your voice will be expressive and full of life. Your child will learn to listen for voice—and even more important, will learn that reading is a joyful thing to do.

Find a cozy spot that's just yours.

Where you read can be almost as important as what you read. In school, children usually must read sitting straight up in hard, unforgiving chairs. But most of us, given a choice, would prefer to curl up on the sofa, in a favorite chair, on the top of a bunk bed, or even on a corner of the rug banked by pillows. A friend remembers Friday nights as "reading nights" in her house. "The popcorn would be popping, and the heat would be coming from the radiator in the corner, and I'd be reclining nearby with my favorite cushiony pillow under my elbow, heading into another world—the world of the book."

When you're out and about . . .

With younger readers/writers, read road signs, billboards, package labels—any large print you encounter! Older readers can read road maps or directions, brochures or travel books, descriptions of a "promising" restaurant or tourist spot.

A common cry from children-as-writers is this: "I don't know what to write about." . . . . We need to water the desert so the writing will bloom. By watering the desert I mean providing children with the most wonderful literature available: the classics, the new, the beautiful, the revolting, the hysterical, the puzzling, the amazing, the riveting.

MEM FOX, RADICAL REFLECTIONS

Try Readers' Theater!

For a change of pace, try some readers' theater, in which you and your child together do a dramatic reading of a play or any book that lends itself to two voices. Anything with two (or more) characters from *Winnie the Pooh* to *Macbeth* will work.

Videotape or audiotape your student reader.

It's difficult to hear your own voice when you read. Hearing themselves on tape can help students with interpretive, expressive reading.

Extend the reading.

Lucy Calkins has said that reading is a little like climbing a mountain. You don't just get to the top and turn right around to go back down. You find a way to linger. Help your young reader linger over books, too. Ask questions. Give opinions. Compare one book to another. Consider people to whom you might recommend the book. Would you read another by this author?

Read like a wolf eats.

GARY PAULSEN

Ideas for young readers' read-alouds . . .

Grocery lists	Road signs
To-do lists	Phone messages
Labels	Book titles
Menu items	Short notes

Discover the fine art of browsing.

Take your child browsing at the local bookstore or library. Pull *lots* of books from the shelves to look at, handle, and read from. Many students NEVER think to get the feel of a book in their hands before choosing it, NEVER read from a book jacket. Take time to show them how much information lies waiting on that back cover or the inside flaps—hints of what the book is about, interesting tidbits about the author. Look at pictures, too. Encourage your child to tell you which books look most appealing and why. Read the first page or paragraph together. Does it intrigue you? Do you like this writer's voice? Is this a book you'd like to take home? Half the joy of reading lies in the anticipation.

Try role playing.

Role playing is very engaging for many students, and it's a great way to build on the reading-writing connection. If you read a book together you enjoy, try writing a diary entry from the perspective of one or two of the characters (you might each adopt a role). Or, you could write short letters in character to each other. Alternative: One of you takes on the role of the author, while the other (in character) interviews him or her. Did the author do a good job of creating your character? Extension: Use puppets to act out the characters.

WRITE, TOO!

Provide writing materials.

Provide plenty of writing materials—paper of all kinds, colors, textures and sizes, pens, pencils, felt tip pens, calligraphy pens, post-its—whatever will invite your student writer to explore writing in original, colorful ways.

Provide a print-rich environment.

As much as you can, fill your writer's world with written materials: books, magazines, newspapers, and writing you create. Young writers are ingenious borrowers, hungrily consuming every writing tidbit the world around them can offer. Older writers need a range of materials from which to draw ideas—from creative to technical. Got a reluctant reader/writer? Sometimes a personal magazine subscription on a topic of the student's choice makes reading (and writing) seem less like drudgery.

Extend your vocabulary.

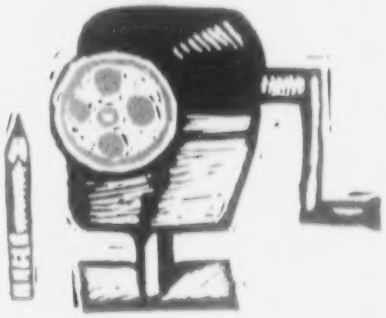
If you add even a word a week to your own vocabulary, and use it in conversation, your child can learn just by talking with you. Ask your child to teach you new words, too. If you run across a word in print you do not know, take time to look it up. That way, you can model what you hope your child will do.

Write notes.

A personal note—just a few words—tucked in a lunch box or pocket can be a wonderful surprise. If you're lucky, you'll get a response. Writing doesn't always have to be BIG.

Choose some good resources together.

Got an excellent dictionary handy? (Picture dictionary for younger writers?) A thesaurus? Handbook for grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, and other editorial concerns? (See the Resources list for some excellent suggestions.) If not, shop together for books both of you like the look and feel of. Use them together, too. Let your young writer see you looking up words in the dictionary, or using a thesaurus with care . . . *Let's see—slim, skinny, scrawny, svelte, slender, thin . . . boy, each one is a little different, isn't it?* When you use a thesaurus, you can't just take the first word on the list. You need the word that's right.



A scavenger hunt is a good way to introduce a handbook: "Can you find the definition of a subordinate clause? Great! See if you can figure out

whether I need a semicolon or period here . . . "
Let your student be the teacher as you solve writing problems together:

Help me understand what a *noun* is.

How do I know when to start a paragraph?

Is *newspaper* one word or two? Where do I look if I don't know?

Is *after* a preposition or adverb?

What's the difference between a clause and a phrase?

Do periods go inside or outside quotation marks?

What are some reasons to use capital letters?

Name three *relative pronouns*.

What's a *fragment*? Can you give an example?

Write together.

Let your child choose the topic. Freewrite together for five or ten minutes, then share the results. See what different directions your writing took.

Prepare invitations.

If you have a family dinner coming up, a birthday, a holiday celebration, let your child design invitations.

Assess as a team.

Put the six traits to work by assessing together. It's fun because *you* get to be the critics! Choose a chapter book, picture book, newspaper article, magazine article—or any piece of writing. Begin with something short. Then, assess it together, using your scoring guide. You don't have to assess every trait. You might look at an advertisement for word choice, or a letter for voice, a recipe or any kind of instruction manual for organization, a news report for detail. Notice the conventions in any published document. Did the writer or editor overlook any errors? How did they do on capitalizing and paragraphing? Why did they make some of the decisions they made (short or long paragraphs, lots of exclamation points or none at all)? Do you agree with their decisions on conventions? Would you have done things differently? Have some fun with your assessment. Don't get too serious—just chat.

Be a writer yourself—and get help from your child.

Be a writer. You do not have to be writing a novel or textbook to teach valuable writing strategies—a simple grocery list holds a dozen potential lessons on word choice, organization, conventions. (*How do you spell macaroni? Let's list all the camping supplies we need together.*) Let your child see that you enjoy writing, and also that it is an important skill for everyday life. Keep track of the kinds of writing you do—

Grocery (and other shopping) lists
To-do lists
Letters and postcards
Notes
Post-it reminders
Journal or diary entries
Evaluations
Poems
Stories
Reports . . .

or any writing that's part of your life. Talk about which kinds of writing you enjoy most or find most or least difficult, and why. Ask your child's opinion so you can compare feelings. You can also ask your child to

Help plan your writing: How should we begin? What should we say? How do we end it?

Help revise: Is it too long or wordy? Did we say enough? Does it sound friendly? Should we use this word here? Should we rewrite the ending?

Help edit: Could you look up *transpose*? I'm not sure I spelled it right. Did I miss any periods? Did I begin this paragraph in the right spot? Do you see any mistakes in this? Thanks for checking it for me!

Share writing that you do on the job.

Do you write as part of your job? Letters? Memos? Reports? Evaluations? Advertising or promotional materials? Directions? Almost everyone in every occupation writes something. Share

some of your work-related writing with your student writer and ask for his/her opinion on any aspect of it, from ideas to voice or word choice to spelling, punctuation or use of a title. Writing is all about making good writer's decisions. Help your student writer become a good decision maker.

Create a photo album or scrapbook.

A photo album representing "a year in the life" or the highlights of a special event—pool party, wedding, birthday, vacation, weekend deck project, neighborhood barbecue—provides a wonderful opportunity for writing short pieces. Work with your child to create a short introduction along with labels and captions that reflect the mood and spirit of the event.

Encourage letters!

No activity is more useful for developing a sense of voice, audience, and purpose than letter writing. Encourage your child to write letters of all kinds, both friendly letters and business letters. Penpals can be wonderful, but just short notes to a friend or relative in another city can work equally well. You might also invite your child to write to

- a favorite sports figure
- a political figure or group
- a favorite teacher or coach from the past
- a celebrity or favorite author
- a local business (for information or to praise a good policy)
- any organization that provides information in response to inquiries

HINT

Obtain addresses from Internet or from any resource librarian.

Write *real* letters, not just e-mail. E-mail is quickly gone, is less convenient to read aloud, and provides a poor substitute for a real polished letter if you want later to paste it—along with your response from the President or Tom Cruise—into your scrapbook.

With the child's permission, share his or her writing.

This could mean anything from helping your child publish, do simply sharing with a trusted friend—"Bill, would you like to hear the poem Rachel wrote?" This broadens the child's audience and also delivers a clear message: *I'm proud of this fine work.*

REMEMBER—NOT ALL WRITING IS PEN TO PAPER, OR FINGERS ON THE KEYBOARD!

Writing truly *is* thinking. This means you can support your child's writing skills not only through actual reading/writing activities, but also by helping him or her become a clear and organized thinker. Here are just a few ideas (you and your young writer may think of others) for becoming a writer by teaching yourself to <u>think</u> like a writer—

Ideas. Be a good observer. Look for the little things. The less-then-obvious. When you take a hike or field trip, tour the art museum, take in the zoo or stroll along the beach, talk about what you see. Ask your child this question, "What do you see through your eyes that someone in a rush would probably miss?"

Debate & discuss. Older children can learn much from oral debating about putting together a sound argument, presenting real evidence—not just your opinion!—and pointing out the weaknesses in the other person's arguments. This is a great warm-up for writing a persuasive essay.

Organization—We organize hundreds—make that thousands—of things in our lives, not just writing. This is a BIG skill, and one we can practice almost continually. Let your child help plan and structure as many things as possible, simple to complex—

Setting the table
Putting together an outfit to wear
Designing an invitation or poster
Coordinating a drawer or closet
Reading a road map
Arranging furniture
Decorating for a holiday
Planning a dinner party or any event
Planning a garden
Coordinating a trip
Deciding which classes to take through high school

All organizational activities take planning. All require decisions about how or where to begin, what to do next, how to make the whole come together.

Voice—Be a listener. See if you can identify voices on radio or on television (without looking). Play tapes in which writers or professional readers read good literature aloud. Really tune in. Talk about differences and favorites. How would this story sound if _____ read it?

Word choice—Play "I spy" when it's time to do the old weekly vocab drill. I spy something . . . *intrusive . . . annoying . . . pernicious . . .* Make it fun.

You can also try—

The synonym game: How many synonyms can you think of for *big . . . hungry . . . angry . . . dangerous . . . hot . . . exciting . . . difficult . . .*

The rhyming game: What rhymes with *bold . . . leaf . . . sigh . . . over . . . now . . . funny . . . down . . . shower . . . run . . .*

Game of opposites: What's the opposite of *meticulous . . . enraged . . . docile . . . frustrating . . . engaging . . . curious . . .*

Sentence Fluency—Try it aloud. As you're composing, revising, editing, read sentences aloud, and try out different versions. See which plays to the ear best:

The students were tired. They were tired from a long year of studying. They were ready for some fun.

Ready for fun were the students following their long year of studying.

Being tired from the long year of studying, fun was what the students were ready for.

A long year of studying behind them, these students felt ready for fun.

Which do you like? Read them aloud. Practice composing orally to get the feel of fluency. (Our vote goes to Sentence 4.) Now—*you* write a set. Have your child write one, too. Pick the most fluent sentence from each set. Then, think about fluency in other contexts. Which of these things can be fluent or non-fluent? How would you know a fluent from a non-fluent example?

Clothing
Traffic
A river
A dancer
A group of dancers
A parade
Shoppers in a crowded mall
A school of fish
Fans at a ball game
Leaves in the wind
Wheat

. . . or?? What other examples can you think of?

Conventions—Here are a few questions to help you think broadly about conventions:

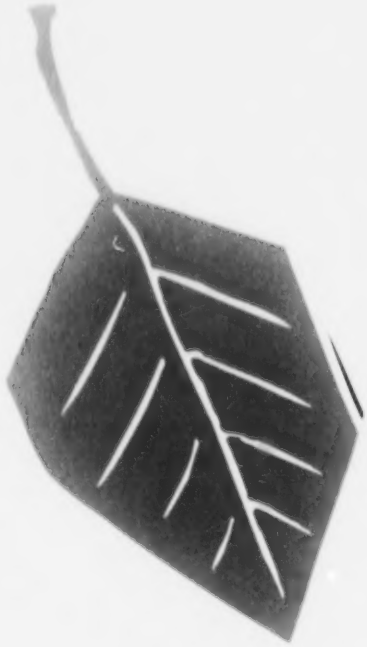
What are the "conventions" of a dinner party?

How about a football game? A school?

What kinds of conventions keep city traffic flowing?

What would convention-less traffic look like?

How does this relate to convention-less writing?



Section 5

Responding to Your Student's Writing

KEEP IT POSITIVE!

Look first for what is done well, and praise this work lavishly. Remember the wise words of Pulitzer Prize winning author and teacher Donald Murray who reminds us, "We learn to write primarily by building on our strengths." So often, in the name of helping, we feel tempted to point out all the problems and errors we see in others' writing. This approach tends not to work well. If overdone, criticism makes young writers feel both hopeless and defensive. It is usually much more effective to help them see what they are doing well (they are often much more aware of their problems than their strengths). On a positive note, you might say

Your voice really shines in this piece!

Your definition of leadership was not only clear, but it made me think of leaders in a new way.

To tell you the truth, I wasn't much in favor of this ballot measure until I read your paper—now I'm rethinking my position.

I'd forgotten so much about what Grandpa's old farm looked like. Your description took me back and made me feel I was right there.

Be excited.

No kidding—this is one of the most important things you can do. Who wants to read a piece of writing aloud to someone who'd rather be doing something—*anything*—else? Eager listeners usually get more and better writing next time. So, let your student writer know you value his/her efforts, and cannot wait to hear the next piece.

When there is a problem . . .

Don't get the idea that writers do not need suggestions for improvement. Of course they do. But the power of your suggestions may lie a great deal in how you phrase them. Avoid beginning comments with "You" or "Your writing." Such comments tend to sound accusatory, even when we do not mean them that way. Instead, try focusing on your own response as a reader and begin with "I saw" or "I felt."

Instead of

"***You need*** a stronger opening here."

You could say,

"When ***I read*** this opening comment on horses, ***I expected*** your paper to be about that. ***I felt*** confused when you switched topics. ***I wonder*** if other readers would feel that way."

Instead of
This paper doesn't seem to have much voice.

You could say,
"***I heard*** your voice come through right here, at the top of page 3. ***I loved*** that comment! ***I was hoping*** for even more of that strong, forceful writing!"

Instead of
This paper just isn't clear.

You could say,
"***I felt confused*** about what happens to air pressure when the air is warmed or cooled. ***Help me*** understand."

Celebrate even the simplest attempts of beginning writers.

If your child is a primary student, he/she may produce scribbles on paper at first, or imitate letter shapes. Those early efforts are highly significant. They show a young writer's recognition that writing has meaning. Ask your child to "read" his or her writing aloud, and talk together about the story or message your child's imagination creates. Your interest will push a young writer to do more!

Be a team.

You and your child can review your child's writing together in a number of ways. See what feels comfortable. Options include

- Reading the paper silently
- Having your child read to you
- Reading it aloud to your child
- Some combination of these

As you read, you might simply respond first by telling the writer what you see in your mind as you read or listen, and what you feel. Respond much as you would if you'd just been to the movies. React openly, honestly and as specifically as you can.

Ask your child if there's a specific question or problem he or she would like to focus on. Some writers, for instance, have difficulty with titles or first lines. Some have trouble knowing how to order information. Some with endings. So ask, "What should we work on?"

Don't try to do everything!

Few things are more tedious, tiring or defeating for a student than an endless review of something he or she has written. We don't learn to drive a car, teach, manage money or play golf in a single lesson—and we surely don't learn to write that way. Writing well takes a lifetime. So, slow down. Be patient. Remind yourself that working hard on one or two problems will pay bigger dividends than trying to do it all.

Be the coach—not the writer.

Tempting as it is to help by "doing," it's important for you to know when to back away and say to your writer, "Run with it." You can help your young writer by

- Brainstorming topics and ideas
- Talking through a story or informational piece
- Providing ideas on how/where to get information
- Being a listener—or reader—during the writing process
- Sharing correct spelling of words, correct use of punctuation, or other editorial tips
- Asking questions to guide revision (*What happened just before this? How many frogs are really poisonous? Why is weight training important for baseball players? What does this word mean? Who is in this picture?*)
- Brainstorming possible leads or endings

Writers build confidence, though, by doing their own drafting, revising and editing—with a good listener/coach nearby.

Focus on ideas first—then editing.

Editing is critical for writers who are ready (those who have received instruction in editing skills), but it needs to happen near the end of the writing process, after

- all important information has been gathered and presented
- details have been organized and re-organized
- voice has been fine-tuned to suit topic and audience
- wording or phrasing has been reviewed and revised
- sentences have been rewritten
- unneeded information has been deleted

Young writers who edit too soon may never get around to completing their thoughts, and may wind up with writing in which the spelling and punctuation are flawless, but the ideas are unclear, incomplete or weakly presented. So, encourage your child to write and revise first, *then* edit.

Section 6

For Student Writers:

Tips on Making Your Writing Stronger

Trait By Trait

Pssst! Students! We slipped in this section just for you. We're hoping parents and teachers will have a peek too, though. We're also hoping you'll add to this list as you learn your own tricks of good revision.

Tips for
Making IDEAS Stronger

Have plenty of information before you write.

The information you need can come from

- Personal experience
- Talking with other people
- Reading
- Reflecting on what you have learned
- Remembering

Writing is constructed from concrete, accurate, sturdy bits of information, and so is good thinking. Thinking and writing depend on the abundance and the quality of information.

DONALD MURRAY, A WRITER TEACHES WRITING

Don't try to tell EVERYTHING.

Topics like "All about Earth" are too big. Don't try to tell ALL there is to know about snapping turtles in one paper. Tell

- What is most interesting
- What your audience most needs to know
- What your readers probably do NOT know already
- Skinny down!! Cut!!!

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Focus on the details that matter.

We don't want [the writer] to describe every ride at Disneyland, or tell us that the Grand Canyon is awesome . . . If one of the rides at Disneyland got stuck, or if somebody fell into the awesome Grand Canyon, that would be worth hearing about.

WILLIAM ZINSSER, ON WRITING WELL, 5TH EDITION

In a paper about solar energy . . .

DON'T tell that solar energy comes from the sun. Your reader probably knows that.

DO tell how much it would cost to heat a 2,000 square foot house for a year using solar energy. Your reader probably does *not* know this.

In a story on how you won the swim meet . . .

DON'T tell what you ate for breakfast or how many miles you drove to the pool. It doesn't matter, does it?

DO tell who your main rival was, how she looked or what she said prior to the race, how you felt or the last thing you heard before you dove into the pool, how you felt just before your hand touched the wall at the end, the exact moment you knew if you'd won or lost and how that felt. Tell what matters.

Tips for
Making ORGANIZATION Stronger

Have a Plan

Information can be organized in MANY ways. Choosing a good fit is a little like picking out shoes. Sometimes you want dressy and formal; other times, the more relaxed and casual, the better. So, have a look . . . Maybe one of these organizational "shoes" fits your topic and purpose—or perhaps you can find another structure that's a better fit.

Big picture to little—organizing by SPACE

If you were describing, say, a room, you might begin with big impressions—size or color—then move gradually to smaller details: furniture, windows, lighting, rugs; then toys, pictures, figurines; then the spider on the window ledge, the half eaten candy bar, the open book, the sock on the rug.

Chronological order—organizing by TIME

If you are writing a story, and telling what happened, you might organize by time. "We got a letter saying Uncle Ted was visiting. We didn't know what to expect . . . We met him at the airport . . . It turned out he was a champion diver . . . He taught me to dive." You include events like these because they are important to your story. But you cannot include EVERYTHING or your paper will grow as big, sprawly and unmanageable as a slippery octopus. This can happen if you begin too far before the real story even starts—"Way back when I was 5, I took swimming lessons but never really learned to dive . . . " Are your swimming lessons important in the story about Uncle Ted? Probably not. So leave them out. Don't keep going too long after the real story ends, either: "We sure had fun with Uncle Ted. Then, the next summer we had a chance to meet some *other* interesting relatives." Great, but what do those other relatives have to do with your story? Nothing. Leave them for another time. Keep your story small. Begin with what matters. When the story ends, stop.

Details in bunches—organizing by CONTENT

Let's say you are writing an informational piece on black bears. You might begin by listing all the important things you know. Get rid of those details everyone knows already: "Black bears are bigger than dogs. Black bears are mammals." Both true—but hardly news! Begin with an interesting bit of information: "Black bears are not

always black. Some are brown, red or even white." For the body of the paper, group details together in "bunches." You might have a paragraph on what black bears eat, one on where they live, one on their natural enemies, and so on. This approach keeps a writer from skipping around. End with a surprise or an important tidbit: "Though often feared, black bears rarely attack people."

Taking a side—organizing by PERSPECTIVE

For a persuasive essay, it's important to keep everything focused on the main issue: for example, whether students should be allowed to roller blade on school grounds. Begin with a clear statement of your position. Then, lay out the arguments in favor (It would be entertaining and fun for students) and the arguments against (It could result in injury). Give the best *evidence* you can to support the side you feel is right. But give some space to the arguments you feel the other side would raise, too! This shows you've considered the big picture. Don't just *list* their arguments, though; this can make you look wishy-washy. You also need to show *why* the arguments of the other side are not as strong as your arguments. Use facts, anecdotes, quotations, a summary of real-life events or any strong evidence you can muster to make sure your reader knows why he or she should agree with you. End with a strong conclusion that refocuses the main advantages of your position. Caution: This kind of organization does not work if (1) there is no strong statement to show what the writer really thinks, (2) there is no support for the writer's position, or (3) the writer does not show why the "other side" has a weaker argument. Oh, and *never* change your mind *during your paper!*

Anticipating the reader's questions—organizing by KEY ANSWERS

Many good writers organize information by imagining what a reader would most want to know and then answering those questions. Let's say you are writing a travel brochure for a popular vacation spot—a city in Florida, perhaps. You might begin by simply listing the questions a visitor would have. Then, choose the 5 or 6 questions that seem most important, and answer them one by one . . .

1. **Where is the city located?**
2. **How large is it?**
3. **What's the weather like?**
4. **What can we do for fun?**
5. **Is it easy to get around (by taxi, bus, car or train)?**
6. **Where could we eat?**

Prose is architecture, not interior decoration.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

A writing plan is not an order or a binding contract. It is a sketch, a guess, a hunch, a suggestion—"Hey, let's head for the beach." . . . It helps to have a plan, to have a sense of destination, and that is what planning writing gives you.

DONALD MURRAY
A WRITER TEACHES WRITING

More tips

for good ORGANIZATION . . .

Begin with a strong lead

How do your favorite writers begin? Take a look! See how professional writers of books, pamphlets, cookbooks, newspaper articles or magazine articles begin. Here are a few leads that have hooked many a reader:

It's a funny thing about mothers and fathers. Even when their own child is the most disgusting little blister you could imagine, they still think that he or she is wonderful.

ROALD DAHL, MATILDA

The Herdmans were absolutely the worst kids in the history of the world. They lied and stole and smoked cigars (even the girls) and talked dirty and hit little kids and cussed their

teachers and took the name of the Lord in vain and set fire to Fred Shoemaker's old broken-down toolhouse.

BARBARA ROBINSON, THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER

"Where's Papa going with that ax?" said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast.

"Out to the hoghouse," replied Mrs. Arable. Some pigs were born last night."

E.B. WHITE, CHARLOTTE'S WEB

When an ancient streamside conifer falls, finally washed or blown from its riverbank down into the water, a complex process of disintegration begins.

DAVID JAMES DUNCAN, RIVER TEETH

See how each lead makes you want to read a little more? And gives you a hint of what might happen next? You *know* the Herdmans will get into more trouble, don't you? And what about Papa and the ax? What *is* he up to down at the hog-house? Use your leads to hook your reader and foreshadow what is coming.

Use connecting words and phrases.

Connecting words and phrases—sometimes called transitions—help your reader see how one idea ties to another. Here are a few examples:

To show location

Above
Beneath
Amid
In back of
Beyond
In front of
Right beside
Throughout
To the right
Others?_____

To show time

First . . . second . . . third . . .
Next
Later
After a while
Then
In the meantime
Afterward
Soon
Others? _____

To compare or contrast

Similarly
In the same way
But
However
On the other hand
Even though
Conversely
Otherwise
Even so
Others? _____

To add information

In addition
Besides
Equally important
For example
Furthermore
Others? _____

To conclude or summarize

As a result
Finally
In conclusion
To sum up
To clarify
In short
In summary
Others? _____

Check your order.

Have you put details together that go together?

Would any part of your paper work better somewhere else?

Have you told things in an order that is
___ informative?
___ interesting?

Should anything be cut? Are you SURE? Does EVERY detail count?

Did you FORGET anything important? Put it in!

End it with a bang!

ENDINGS ARE CRITICAL. IT'S YOUR LAST CHANCE TO LEAVE A GOOD IMPRESSION.

The perfect ending should take the reader slightly by surprise and yet seem exactly right to him . . . It is like the curtain line in a theatrical comedy. We are in the middle of a scene (we think) when suddenly one of the actors says something funny, or outrageous, or epigrammatic, and the lights go out.

WILLIAM ZINSSER
ON WRITING WELL, 1ST EDITION

What makes for a showstopper conclusion? Let's see what some of the pro's have done:

Plymouth Colony had taken root. In time, its children would become known as New Englanders and Americans and the seedling colony would blossom and bear extraordinary fruit.

ROBERT SAN SOUCI,
N.C. WYETH'S PILGRIMS

But where, you might ask, is this book that the BFG wrote?

It's right here. You've just finished reading it.

ROALD DAHL, THE BFG

When we see lightning blaze a jagged path through a storm, we have some understanding of the powerful forces at work inside a thunderhead. But we are also reminded that some of lightning's mysteries have yet to be explained.

STEPHEN KRAMER, LIGHTNING

Outlined on a sea of green grass stood these two great athletes, one black, one white, both wearing the same team uniform.

"I am standing by him," Pee Wee Reese said to the world. "This man is my teammate."

PETER GOLENBOCK, TEAMMATES

How does your favorite book end? Take a look.

Tips for
Making VOICE Stronger

Read!

Which authors do you enjoy most? Chances are, their writing has voice. Voice is contagious. When you read lots of writing with voice, you tend to put more voice in your writing, too.

Take a chance. Believe in what you say.

Take a risk. S-t-r-e-t-c-h. Share your honest thoughts or responses to experience. Give your writing a new shape. Isn't there a format (poetry, poster, brochure) you've wanted to try? Isn't there a voice, an attitude, a tone, a way of saying things you've wished could belong to you? Make it happen. Remember, when you write, you're the authority. You're in charge. Shape the writing to suit your inner voice, your inner self. Write with conviction.

Don't say . . .

There is a possibility that the new rule on skateboarding could prove to be a good idea in the minds of some people. (How uncertain can you get?!)

Say . . .

The new rule on skateboarding will reduce injuries and keep students safe. (That's conviction—that's *voice!)*

Write to your best listener.

Who is your BEST listener? The person you'd MOST like to share your writing aloud with? The person you TRUST to give you the very best feedback in the whole world? Write as if you were writing to that person.

Write letters.

Write letters. Often. It's hard not to have voice when you know exactly who you're writing to. Picture the person's face. Really SEE it. NOW write.

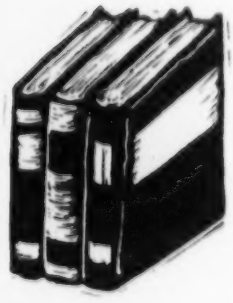
Tune in to the voices of others.

If you get a chance, listen to an audio reading of a book by a favorite author. Listen to how skillful reading brings out the voice of a piece.

Tips for
Making WORD CHOICE Stronger

Make friends with verbs.

Is your paper stuffed with weak "to be" verbs: *is, are, was, were?* These are good, useful words if they're not overused, but they cannot carry big ideas. You can't support an elephant (BIG idea) on a step-ladder (tiny verb). Notice the differences in these examples:



Alice was 10 minutes late for breakfast.

Alice huffed to the breakfast table 10 minutes late, flung herself into her chair, and snagged the Wheaties.

The wind was strong.

The wind fumed and shrieked about the house, yanking at the loose shingles.

Verbs are the most important of all your tools. They push the sentence forward and give it momentum . . . . Don't "set up" a business that you can establish. Don't "come upon" an object that you can discover, or "take hold of" one that you can grab. Don't "put up with" pain; bear it.

WILLIAM ZINSSER, ON WRITING WELL, 1ST EDITION

Nix on redundancy.

Have you repeated yourself? Read your paper aloud. Have you used important nouns or verbs or descriptive words more than once each? More then twice? Replace those clones! Get some variety!

Paint a picture.

A good quick check for word choice is to simply ask yourself if you can picture anything. If the answer is NO, you've got work to do:

Can't picture it . . .

The committee was ineffective.

Now I can picture it!

Committee members sagged in their chairs, yawning, trying to keep themselves awake with sour coffee and stale chocolate doughnuts. Bill droned on about expenses while Stan poked himself with a newly sharpened pencil to keep his sagging lids open. Someone was snoring softly.

Cut the fat.

Got a word or phrase you could cut? A whole sentence? Do it. When it comes to strong writing, leaner is better. Make every word carry its weight.

No matter how good your grasp of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and other fundamentals, you cannot write well unless you train yourself to write with fewer words.

RICHARD LEDERER & RICHARD DOWIS,
THE WRITE WAY

Tips for
Making SENTENCE FLUENCY Stronger

Read it aloud.

Is it easy to do? Do you have to pause anywhere? If you do, take a second look. How could you smooth out the bumps?

Hear it in another voice.

Have someone read to you. Listen to your paper. Is it easy on the ear? Do you like the sound? Does the reader have an easy time? Does she stumble? Fumble? Re-read? If so, you need to smooth some wrinkles.

Check out the first 4.

Get a sheet of scratch paper. Write out the first 4 words of every sentence in your paper. See BIG DIFFERENCES? Great! That's what you want: variety. See a PATTERN? Not so good. See if you can begin in different ways.

Get the shorties.

Got a lot of very short, choppy sentences?

We went to the beach. It was fun. We met friends. We flew kites. We stayed all day. We had lunch. The day went fast. We got in the car. We went home.

(Chop, chop, chop, blah, blah, blah . . .)

Try combining:

Last Saturday, we met friends at the beach for some kite flying fun. The day went so fast, it seemed we had just finished the last bite of our fish and chips lunch when it was time to pile in the car for home.

Feeling breathless?

On the other hand, some writers do not pause for breath! Is this your problem? Did you forget to pause for periods?

So we went in the house and it was spooky and I mean spooky but Brad just kept right on going and he said he wasn't scared because he had been in haunted houses before even if they weren't quite like this one though I wasn't sure I believed him because I didn't think he had really been in a haunted house but then . . .

Whew! Take a breath now and then. Don't let *ands, buts, becauses* and *so thens* hook together so many clauses and phrases your reader passes out from lack of oxygen. Punctuate! Breathe! Divide!

Tips for
Making CONVENTIONS Stronger

Wait!

Wait to edit (if you can) till your final draft is at least 2-3 days old. You will see errors much more clearly. Don't do ANY editing until your final draft is finished. You might cut a whole paragraph from your first draft. Why edit it?

Get 'em one by one.

Look for one kind of error at a time. You can usually find grammatical errors by reading aloud. Look next for missing punctuation at the ends of sentences. Now, paragraphs—do you have any? Do they begin in the right spots? Use a highlighter pen to mark words you need to check for spelling. OR, use the spell checker on your computer. But don't trust it totally! Ewe could halve encore wrecked words that where steal words an the computer wood never ketch them.

Begin in the middle.

When you edit, don't ALWAYS begin at the beginning. Go through it once beginning in the middle. Once from the start of the final paragraph. That way, you'll cover each part when you're fresh.

Ask a trusted friend.

Got a friend who is a good editor, who has a proofreader's eye? Ask that person to help you—once you've found all the errors you can find—to spot what you've missed. Trade off. Maybe you can put your proofreader's eye to work for your friend, too!

Keep writing tools handy.

Get a good dictionary, spelling list, handbook with punctuation and grammar tips—whatever you need to make your work look as you want it to look. Have these things handy before you begin to edit so you won't have to get up and hunt for them. Who wants to do that?

Read s-l-o-w-l-y.

Lots of little stuff gets missed when you read too quickly. Slow down. Look. Take your time. Read aloud. Editing is like looking for clues. You have to look carefully and look in the corners or you'll miss things.

Section 7

Answers to Questions Parents Often Ask

1. Does 6-trait writing fit with writing process?

Yes! It's an excellent fit. Normally, writing process includes these steps:

Prewriting

Listing, brainstorming, talking, interviewing, reading, word webbing—or doing whatever puts thinking in motion and makes it easier to begin writing.

Drafting

Getting first thoughts down on paper without worrying overmuch about organization, completeness or correctness.

Sharing

Sharing writing with a partner or in a writing group in order to get some audience response in preparation for revision.

Revising

Taking a closer look at main ideas, details and support, organizational structure, voice and tone, language and phrasing and fluency—then reworking to make the piece clearer, more concise, more interesting or more accurate.

Editing

Thinking like a copy editor, attending to details, proofreading and correcting the text for grammar and usage, punctuation, spelling, capitalization and paragraphing.

Publishing

Going public in some way—whether putting a piece up on the bulletin board, making a book in class, or sending it to an outside publisher.

Where's the fit?

The traits fit into every single one of these steps because they influence how students think about writing. The step that is influenced *most*, however, is revision. Often, students do not know how to revise. They do not know where to begin. Six-trait instruction opens up a whole world of possibilities. Suddenly, students find they could

Try a new lead

Rework the organization

See a character differently (What was his real motive?)

Write from a different point of view (How would the same piece look through Uncle Ed's eyes?)

Cut some deadwood (detail that does not matter)

Expand ideas with new details

Change the voice

Reword a phrase or two—drop clichés and tired expressions, punch it up!

Check sentence beginnings so they do not ALL begin the same way

Change the whole format—perhaps a diary works better than a poem

In revising, students attend to the traits of

Ideas

Organization

Voice

Word Choice

Sentence Fluency

As they work with the scoring guide, they discover it provides a step ladder to success. The traits define the very things professional writers attend to as they revise. Read the level 5 descriptions again, and you'll see a blueprint for revision! So, what about . . .

Conventions?

Conventions fit well with the step of editing. After all, spelling, punctuation, grammar and usage, paragraphing, and capitalization are all things copy editors attend to.

2.
Our state test looks a little different from this model. Will this make a big difference in how well students do?

It should make little or no difference—unless, of course, there are serious philosophical gaps between the 6-trait model and the test (e.g., the test emphasizes *only* conventions, in contrast to the more balanced approach of six distinct traits). The six traits complement and support almost any district or state writing assessment because they are *real*. They are the qualities that make writing—*any* writing—work well. This is important because it means students who know the traits will be able to write

Business letters that are clear and well organized

Public relations materials with just the right word choice and voice

Research and evaluation summaries that are detailed, clear and fluent

Instructions that follow a logical sequence

Travel brochures with language and phrasing that elicit the right audience response

Journalistic articles that include all important information

Computer manuals in which language builds a bridge to users rather than creating a barrier

When we teach the six traits, we are teaching what is important to good writing in any context. Students who know the traits well, therefore, tend to perform well on any sort of writing test, no matter how it is scored. They do not perform well because they have been taught to write "to the test." They perform well because they have been taught to write. Period.

3.
Are some traits more important than others?

Not in this model. Some analytical models do weight traits, making some worth more points than others. The philosophy behind the 6-trait model is that writing is vast and complex, comprising many qualities, and that these qualities can be summarized under the "umbrella" categories of the six traits.

Young writers are learners in all aspects of the writing craft. It is patently false to send them the message that growth in writing depends mainly on the ability to produce perfectly edited copy. Mastery of editing skills will not ensure the production of high quality writing. I've read too many samples of writing . . . that were wordy, pompous, vague, mealymouthed, and perfectly edited.

TOM ROMANO, CLEARING THE WAY: WORKING WITH TEENAGE WRITERS

4.
Does 6-trait writing put enough emphasis on conventions?

It is often supposed that any model having multiple traits tends to slight conventions—mechanical correctness. Nothing could be further from the truth! In fact, just the opposite is true. In order to understand why, though, we need to ask ourselves seriously and thoughtfully, "What is the purpose of conventions?" Consider David Lambuth's description of how punctuation (just one feature of conventions) came to be:

The earliest writing was unpunctuated. The reader was left to pick out sentence from sentence as best he could. Later it was discovered that separating

sentences from each other by some sort of sign made reading easier.

LAMBUTH, THE GOLDEN BOOK ON WRITING

Think of it: No punctuation. No paragraphs. No capital letters. No consistent spelling. What difference would it make? It would certainly make reading a whole lot harder! But the point is—so what? Do we care? Most of us do, yes. We care not because we love conventions, though, but because we love *ideas*. We love words, ways of expressing thoughts, and we love the voices of the writers who move us. Conventions exist to serve the expression and organization of ideas. As those ideas become more important, so do the conventions that help make them clear. That's why conventions matter so much more in a legal document or a Shakespearean play than in a grocery list.

The 6-trait philosophy is that every writer should be taught conventions and taught to edit his or her work. In this way, we teach young writers to use conventions as they were meant to be used—not as reflections of dry, boring rules, but as a tool for making ideas clear and readable. Good conventions are, simply put, a way for writers to show personal self-respect.

5.
What about invented spelling (sometimes called temporary or transitional spelling)?

One big question for many parents is, *Is this kind of "guess and go" spelling a good thing?* Shouldn't students learn the correct spellings of all words they use? Eventually, we hope they will learn to spell many (if not most) of the words they use—and that they'll know how and where to get help with others.

Meantime, though, two very good things are happening with inventive spelling:

First, student writers are making best guesses, which means they're needing to think—to connect letter sounds with letters. Don't most of us do this? What would you do if you could not spell *broccoli? Cincinnati? Hippopotamus? Aerodynamic? Penicillin?* Wouldn't you make your best guess—then perhaps look it up to check? Students are using the same thinking process. They simply need to use it a little more often and with a few more words than an adult writer.

The other good thing that's happening is that students are focusing on ideas, expression, voice, and vocabulary—the advanced thinking part of writing. Would we really want a student to drop words like *elaboration, modify, global, ecstatic* or *inclusive* (all taken from 3rd and 4th grade papers) from their vocabulary just because they could not spell these words perfectly? Should they wait till they know they *can* spell them? How long will that be? What will their writing look like in the meantime?

Keep in mind, though, that invented or transitional spelling is not an invitation to spell words just any old way. On the contrary. It is a strategy for using what you know about sound-letter coordination to spell every word as well as you can in order to make things easy for a reader.

Invented spelling is a transition, an opportunity for writers of any age to let the ideas flow, unhindered by a premature concern for spelling, not limited by the restraint to write only about those things they can spell correctly. Correctness of spelling is important later in the writing process, and a concern for correctness in spelling comes naturally to writers of any age who are conscious of purpose and audience.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH PARENT'S GUIDE TO LITERACY, PRE-K THROUGH GRADE 5

6.
My child's teacher only scores one, two or three traits at times instead of all six. Is this a good strategy?

Often it is, yes. It's easy to become concerned that something is "missing" if only one or two traits are scored on a given assignment. Actually, though, it makes good sense for teachers to assess students—at first—on those traits they've taught, or on those that are most critical to a given assignment. Later in the school year, or for a different assignment, all traits will probably be assessed.

7.

Would it be helpful if my child's teacher marked all the errors on each paper?

It seems as if it should help, doesn't it? After all, it takes a long time and a lot of effort. A red-penned paper looks like writing improvement in action. It is anything but, however. The reason is simple: The person who is doing all the editing is the person doing all the learning. If we want students to be competent, capable editors, we must turn the red pen over to them.

Traditions in the teaching of English hold that compositions must be marked and commented upon—the more thoroughly, the better. But research . . . suggests that such feedback has very little effect on enhancing the quality of student writing—regardless of frequency or thoroughness.

GEORGE HILLOCKS, JR.
RESEARCH ON WRITTEN COMPOSITION, IN CREATING WRITERS

THINGS THAT DO HELP IN THE TEACHING OF CONVENTIONS AND EDITING:

Teaching students to recognize and use copy editor's symbols (a simple list you and your child can use together follows).

Giving students LOTS of practice in editing someone else's work (an anonymous paragraph—on paper or on a computer screen).

Keeping editing practice short, focused (one kind of error—say, spelling) and frequent (each day).

Copy Editor's Symbols

⸗	Delete	There are six ~~of~~ traits.
⁀	Close the gap	Org anization is critical.
⁀	Delete & close up	She has a wiry sense of humor.
stet	Return to original	You need ~~much~~ stet stronger voice here.
∧	Insert	Roald Dahl writes with voice.
∩	Transpose	Revise you before edit.
⊙	Add a period	Your writing should sound like you⊙
;∧	Insert a semicolon	Writing is important ;∧ so is reading.
,∧	Insert a comma	If your writing is wordy ,∧ shorten it.
?∧	Add a question mark	Who stole my handy scoring guide?∧
/	Change to lower case	Fluency is a key Trait.
≡	Change to capital	Maya angelou ≡ is a fluent writer.
¶	Start a new paragraph	¶ My third reason for suspecting him . . .
———	Italicize	I read Moby Dick twice.
∨ ∨	Add quotation marks	∨ Don't edit my work, ∨ she cried.

Asking students to edit their own work—not just recopy a teacher's editing. (Would you expect a math teacher to re-do faulty multiplication? Should the social studies teacher re-do a mislabeled map?)

Making sure students have access to good dictionaries, handbooks, etc.

Helping students develop a proofreader's eye. (There's a spelling error in this newspaper headline—can you spot it? I see a mistake on that billboard—do you?)

Asking students to think about the reasons behind the conventions. (The writer used a semicolon here—do you know why? Where would you begin a new paragraph? What does the apostrophe in the word don't replace? What do quotation marks mean?)

8.
Does 6-trait writing work with all forms (modes) of writing?

Basically, yes. The 6-trait model works with any of the following prose forms of writing:

Narrative: Writing that tells a story (Examples: a novel, short story, diary, journal)

Expository: Writing that informs (Examples: an essay, research summary, technical manual, textbook chapter, end-of-year report)

Persuasive: Writing that informs and also attempts to convince (Examples: letter to the editor, political speech or voter's pamphlet summary, restaurant review, movie review, grant proposal)

Descriptive: Writing that describes or paints a "word picture" (Examples: a travel brochure, menu, public relations document)

Business writing: Writing intended to answer a question, solve a problem, summarize work completed, propose new strategies or provide information in a business context (Examples: business letter, proposal, memo, annual report)

Technical writing: Writing that presents technical (specialized) information either to an audience of specialists or to a general audience for whom that information must be made readable (Examples: a computer manual, an essay from a science journal, a summary of current research on energy sources, a medical textbook, a legal document)

Literary analysis: Writing that takes a close-up look at a literary work, such as a novel or play, explaining meaning or the author's probable intent (Examples: an analytical report written by a student, film review, book review)

Journalism: Writing that essentially reports what happened when and how and who was involved (Examples: newspaper or journal articles)

The 6-trait model does not, however work with poetry. In a poem, fluency and conventions are often very different from those in prose writing. Poets often take liberties with punctuation and capitalization that make the scoring of conventions difficult. In addition, "ideas" and "voice" often call for considerable interpretation.

9.
If my child writes on a word processor, what differences will this make?

Word processing has several advantages. Often, students who have access to a word processor write more—because it goes faster. They also tend to revise more. It's easy on a computer to move paragraphs around, put in new information, or delete sections you no longer want. On the other hand, though a word processing program can make a document look neat and appealing, it cannot magically come up with strong content, authentic details, compelling voice—or even top notch word choice. It can tell the writer how long his or her sentences are, but cannot make them fluent. Moreover, it can only catch *some possible* errors—contrary to what many students would like to believe. Computer programs catch many spelling errors, for instance, but cannot tell that you meant *dog* when you wrote *bog* or *lead* for *led* or *match* for *mash* or even *two* for *too*. Writer's decisions must still be made by the writer.

10.
How will 6-trait scores translate into grades? Is a 5 the same as an A?

A 5 is not an A, even though it seems like a nice match: 5 = A, 4 = B, and so on. Sounds logical enough, doesn't it? Here's why that doesn't make sense, though: A letter grade is holistic. This means it represents how the whole piece of writing works — ideas, organization, words, phrasing, conventions — *all* of it. A trait

score represents performance on one aspect of the writing—ideas *or* voice *or* conventions. So trait scores and grades are not equal. There's another reason not to make this conversion, too. Trait scores have definite meanings. Those meanings are written down in the form of criteria (in the *Student Friendly Guide*, for example). Letter grades do not always have such definite meanings. Is an A in one class always comparable to an A in another? As teachers themselves will tell you, no! Further, letter grades may be based on more than performance; some take into account effort, attitude, improvement, and class participation. Trait scores are based on one thing only: performance. Because of these differences, no direct correlation is possible.

Most teachers who use the 6-trait model do not grade individual pieces of writing. Instead, they grade a body of work produced over time. They do this by keeping track of all points earned by each student during a defined grading period. The letter grade is based on the percentage of points earned. For instance, let's say a student *could* earn 120 points if she received 5's on all traits scored during the grading period. If she earns 100 points, that is about 83%, which may translate into a letter grade of B.

11. What are some of the signs of a strong writing program?

Writing programs, even those that make use of both process writing and the 6-trait model, are certainly not all alike—nor should they be. We want students to experience variety, not only in the kinds of writing they do, but also in the instructional approaches through which those experiences are presented. Still, successful writing programs seem to share some common features, and you may wish to ask whether some of these are characteristic of your child's writing program.

Students have numerous opportunities to write.

Students write for multiple purposes (to tell a story, to document findings, to share information) and multiple audiences (not just the teacher, but perhaps a group of young students or members of the business community).

The teacher reads aloud, both to illustrate fine writing, and to help students develop an appreciation for fine literature.

Students themselves read aloud sometimes, singly or in pairs or groups, to develop an ear for voice and fluency, and to learn to interpret text as they read.

Students are sometimes asked to wear the assessor's hat: Is this a strong piece of writing? Why do you think so?

Students are active participants in the assessment process. They understand how their work is assessed, and sometimes, in partnership with the teacher, they assess their own work.

Students have a vocabulary that lets them think and speak like writers. They can talk comfortably about things like voice, idea development, organization, leads and conclusions, word choice, fluency and conventions.

Writing is taught using a process-based approach that allows time and opportunity for prewriting, drafting, sharing, revising and editing.

Section 8

Glossary of Common Assessment Terms

Assessment

Assessment comes from the Latin word *assidere*, which means to sit beside. In education, this "sitting beside" includes observing, collecting information, coaching, and otherwise supporting the learning process. Assessment is an integral part of learning. It invites the learner to also take a close look at his/her own learning process, to reflect on it, to build on strengths, and to work on improving.

Alternative Assessment

Alternative assessment is any assessment in which the learner creates a response to a question rather than choosing from responses that have been provided. Alternative assessments might include short answer questions, essays, performance assessments, oral presentations, exhibitions and portfolios.

Achievement Test

Achievement tests are standardized tests designed to measure the amount of skill or knowledge students in a school or district have gathered with respect to a very focused area. The "standardized" component of these tests has nothing to do with how good or complete the test is. It simply refers to the fact that all the tests are administered and scored the same way (essentially by machine), and also that the tests are designed to measure content that has (presumably) been taught to students in a fairly standardized way.

Analytic Trait Scoring

Analytic scoring identifies traits essential to success in a given performance and requires trained raters to score those traits individually. In 6-trait analytic writing assessment, for instance, instead of getting just one score for "overall effectiveness," a paper receives six separate scores—for ideas, organization, voice, word choice, fluency and conventions. Together, these scores create a profile of performance. The use of a scoring guide in which traits are defined in writing helps ensure consistency in the way writing (or any kind of performance) is assessed.

Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment is based on tasks that mimic real life as closely as possible. A good example is a driving test, in which a would-be driver is asked to cope with many of the situations he/she will encounter in everyday driving.

Competency Test

This is a test intended to demonstrate that a student has met established standards of skills or knowledge.

Criteria

When you hear the word criteria, think *language*. In performance assessment—of which writing is one example—we do not have "right" or "wrong" answers as we would on, say, a multiple choice test. Instead, we have a continuum of performance that ranges from beginning levels through developing right on up to proficient. Criteria are the *language* or the descriptors that define levels of performance for each trait assessed.

Criterion-Referenced Test

In a criterion-referenced test, students are not compared to each other. Instead, each student's performance is measured against criteria that define success. If every student meets the criteria (standards) considered important, each student will be regarded as successful.

Essay Test

An essay test requires students to respond to a question (prompt) by writing original text.

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Evaluation

An evaluation is a judgment about whether a behavior, product, program (or whatever) is or is not producing the desired results. Evaluations are usually based on multiple sources of information that might include surveys, test scores, observations, and many other sources.

High Stakes Testing

High stakes testing occurs whenever a major, significant decision with significant consequences is made on the basis of test results. Examples include promotion, certification, graduation, and denial of or access to learning opportunities.

Multiple-Choice Test

A multiple-choice test is one in which students select the correct or best answer from several alternatives.

Norm-Referenced Test

In a norm-referenced test, a student's or group's performance is compared to that of students who are like them—a peer group known as the "norm group."

Objective Test

The term *objective* is a little misleading. It is often taken to mean "fair" or "free of human judgment." Actually, both impressions are a little off the mark. An objective test is one in which *scoring procedures* do not depend on human judgment (quite unlike, say, a writing assessment, in which human judgment of performance is the whole point). Usually, objective tests are multiple-choice and are machine scored. It is important to keep in mind, though, that while human judgment does not influence the *scoring* of objective (e.g., multiple-choice) tests, it is a *very large* factor in test construction—that is, in determining test content and test design. On a multiple-choice test, each item must be written by someone who decides (1) which content is worth testing, (2) how it will be tested, and (3) how both "correct" and "incorrect" responses will be worded. If we take a close, scrutinizing look at a multiple-choice test, we'll likely find that some questions were important to ask and were worded clearly with well-defined correct answers. In other cases, though, we might wonder whether a given question was worth asking in the first place—or a careful reading may show that it was worded in a confusing manner or that more than one option could be considered "correct." In short, "objective" has nothing to do with fairness or quality, but only with the way in which the test is scored.

Performance Assessment

Performance assessment is based on direct observation of a student's work (a writing sample) or process (the performance itself—say, a dive or an oral presentation). The quality of the performance is judged on the basis of clearly specified criteria that define what the given performance looks like at beginning, developing, and proficient levels. Sound performance assessment is characterized by clear targets; a well-defined sense of purpose (how will we use results?); sound, thoroughly tested criteria that are known to everyone (including students); and quality tasks that are engaging, challenging (without demanding the impossible), and relevant to what we really want students to be able to do.

Portfolio

A portfolio is a purposeful collection of significant work, carefully selected, dated and presented to tell the story of a student's achievement or growth in well-defined areas of performance (writing, reading, math, etc.). A portfolio usually includes personal analysis which the student explains why each piece was chosen and what it shows about his/her growing skills and abilities.

Prompt

A prompt is a picture, word, phrase, sentence or paragraph intended to generate ideas and give a student a starting point for writing. A prompt is just that—a stimulus. In most writing assessments, therefore, students are scored on the quality of the writing, therefore, not meticulous attention to following the directions of the prompt. For instance, a prompt might ask a student to write about a favorite or memorable place. A student might, as one did, write about the inside of his own mind—his imagination. Some people might argue that this is not a "place" in the sense that "New York" is a place. But such literal interpretation rarely seems as important as giving students every opportunity to respond creatively to a prompt and to show what they can do as writers.

Rater

A rater is a person who is trained to use criteria consistently and skillfully in assessing performance. Raters are most often teachers, but can also be professionals whose work is relevant to the area being assessed (e.g., editors or journalists for writing performance) or parents with teaching or content area experience.

Reliability

Reliability is a measure of consistency—over time, over similar performances, or over raters. We would not want the scores on any performance to be simply a matter of chance! Good training and sound criteria help ensure that comparable performances will receive comparable scores—regardless of when the scoring occurs or which rater does the scoring. Sound performance assessments should guarantee reliability; otherwise, results are neither meaningful or useful.

Rubric

Rubric is another word for scoring guide.

Scoring Guide

Written criteria used to judge a particular kind of performance: e.g., writing, public speaking, math problem solving. Criteria are the language that defines how performance looks at various levels: beginning, developing, and proficient.

Task

A task is simply the activity the student is required to do as part of an assessment. Sample tasks include completing a chemistry lab, preparing an argument for debate, writing a paper, or solving an open-ended math problem.

Task-Specific Scoring Guide

A task-specific scoring guide is designed for use in judging performance on a particular assignment—e.g., a literary analysis of *The Helen Keller Story*. (Compare this highly specific, focused approach to assessing, say, performance in *writing*.) Such scoring guides are not time efficient since a separate one must be developed for every task assessed. Generalizable scoring guides (guides that can be used with almost any assignment in a given content area, such as math or writing) are preferred by most teachers.

Validity

Validity is an indication of how well an assessment actually measures what it is intended to measure. For example, a valid measure of writing focuses primarily on the writing, not the student's ability to read and interpret a difficult prompt.

Section 9

Resources You May Find Helpful

Want to know more? Following is a brief list of resources that can give you additional information on the 6-trait model, effective teaching practices in writing, and tips for parents. Many of these are quoted in this handbook. Chances are your child's teacher has additional information too. Also, many schools and districts provide training sessions in 6-trait scoring especially for parents. Inquire at your child's school if you are interested.

Culham, Ruth and Vicki Spandel. 1996. Picture Books: An Annotated Bibliography for Teaching Writing. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Updated annually.

Want some ideas for read-aloud picture books? Check out this comprehensive bibliography. Hundreds of outstanding picture books suitable for readers/listeners of all ages (primary through adult) are reviewed and listed by trait: books recommended for illustrating or teaching ideas, organization, voice, etc. The new edition includes sample teaching lessons, too—but even if you just want tips on what to read and share, you'll find this a useful resource to take along to the bookstore or library as you and your student writer make choices. Phone orders: 503-275-9519.

Fox, Mem. 1993. Radical Reflections. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company. 166 pages. ISBN 0-15-607947-X.

In her inimitable, outspoken style, Mem Fox writes of the need to use good reading as the basis for strong writing. Of particular interest to parents is her wonderful chapter "Lessons From a Home," in which she urges teachers to look closely at the educationally sound things many parent do instinctively: read aloud to children, read books they enjoy and love, make reading fun (not a chore), encourage open participation by the child, and make the child-reader comfortable so he/she will think of reading in a positive way.

Hydrick, Janie. 1996. Parent's Guide to Literacy for the 21st Century. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE. 96 pages. ISBN: 0-8141-4688-0.

This practical and friendly little book is packed with ideas

for giving your child a step up in literacy. It is a very strong complement to this handbook. Particular emphasis on K-Grade 5.

Lambuth, David. The Golden Book on Writing. 1972. New York: Viking. 79 pages. ISBN: 670-00158-9.

Yes, it's been around for a while. Don't let that put you off. It's readable, practical, very direct, and brimming with sound advice on narrowly defined topics: organization, style, word choice, modifiers, sentence construction, paragraphs, precision, lively verbs, and much more. Notice how short it is. Lambuth practices what he preaches: Say what you have to say, then be quiet.

Lane, Barry. 1993. After THE END. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. ISBN: 0-435-08714-2.

One of the finest books ever written on revision. It's readable, down to earth, practical, often comical, insightful throughout, and clearly written by a person who knows writing and revision through the eyes of both teacher and writer. Barry knows his stuff—and knows how to teach it, too. One of my *all-time* favorites.

Lederer, Richard and Richard Dowis. The Write Way: the S.P.E.L.L. Guide to Real-Life Writing. 1995. New York: Simon & Schuster. 241 pages. ISBN: 0-671-52670-7.

Secondary student writers will enjoy this book thoroughly. It's hilarious in parts—and face it: not everyone can make jokes about grammar and punctuation. Richard Lederer can, however. His wit is rapier sharp, and he enlightens and entertains simultaneously. There's not a dull moment to be found in this compendium of advice on such things as cutting the "fat" from your writing, writing like the pro's, ways to get started, eschewing (*eschewing*—does anyone really *use* that word?) common errors, and much more. Quizzes let you test your knowledge and skill (100 demonic demons will tell you if you're orthographically challenged—i.e., a poor speller!). It's inventive, fun, and informative. A winner.

Murray, Donald M. A Writer Teaches Writing. 1985. New York: Houghton-Mifflin. 252 pages. ISBN: 0-395-35441.

Anyone browsing in my personal library would identify this immediately as a favorite book. It's all worn out. If you're serious about writing well and really understanding how writers think, this is your book. No one—absolutely *no one*—writes more eloquently about writing than Donald Murray. This is a textbook that reads like a novel. Yes, it is written for educators. Does that make it off-limits for students? Not at all. In fact, I've used it more to help with my writing than as a teaching resource. Sample topics: Writing to discover, inviting surprise, editing to publish, making writing inviting, handling writing problems. A classic.

O'Brien-Palmer, Michelle. Bookwrite: A Creative Bookmaking Guide for Young Authors. 1992. Kirkland, Washington: MicNik Publications: (206)-881-6476. 116 pages. ISBN: 1-879235-01-3.

This is surely one of the most student friendly books ever written. It's clear, whimsically illustrated, easy to follow, and just plain delightful. If you have a primary student who likes book making, you will find endless uses for this excellent resource. Every step in the writing process from brainstorming and story boarding to final editing and publishing is covered. This writer truly respects young authors, and it shows in her tone and style. A treasure.

Romano, Tom. Clearing the Way: Working with teenage writers. 1987. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann. 181 pages. ISBN: 0-435-08439.

A clear, no nonsense sort of book that defines the basics of a good process writing approach. Directed primarily to secondary teachers. It is filled with practical and useful tips on teaching, conferring, and evaluating writing, all illustrated with examples of student work.

Sebranek, Patrick, Verne Mayer and Dave Kemper. Write for College. 1997. Wilmington, MA: Great Source Education Group. 883 pages. ISBN: 0-669-44402.

This is a flat-out terrific handbook for the high school or college student. It is clear, com-

plete, easy to use, and endlessly helpful. Topics include process writing, prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, style, building strong sentences, writing good paragraphs, mastering the college essay, business writing, personal writing, report writing, writing about literature, MLA and APA documentation styles, searching for information at the library or via Internet, writing with a computer, taking notes, reading to learn, speaking effectively, succeeding in college, and much, *much* more. The language complements the 6-trait model beautifully. Examples of student writing help make every concept understandable. Many classrooms make use of this book (or its counterparts), so check before you purchase it for yourself. An excellent investment in learning.

Additional handbooks by the same great authors/publisher for younger students—

School to Work. Mainly high school. Useful for middle school also.

Writers Inc., 2nd edition. Middle school on up. Excellent for high school, too.

Write Source 2000. For upper elementary through high school.

Writer's Express. Upper elementary and older.

Write Track. Grades 3 and 4.

Write Away. Grades 2 and 3.

Write One. Grade 1.

Phone orders: 1-800-289-4490.

Spandel, Vicki and Richard J. Stiggins. Creating Writers, 2nd edition. 1997. New York: Addison-Wesley/Longman. 312 pages. ISBN: 0-8013-1578-6.

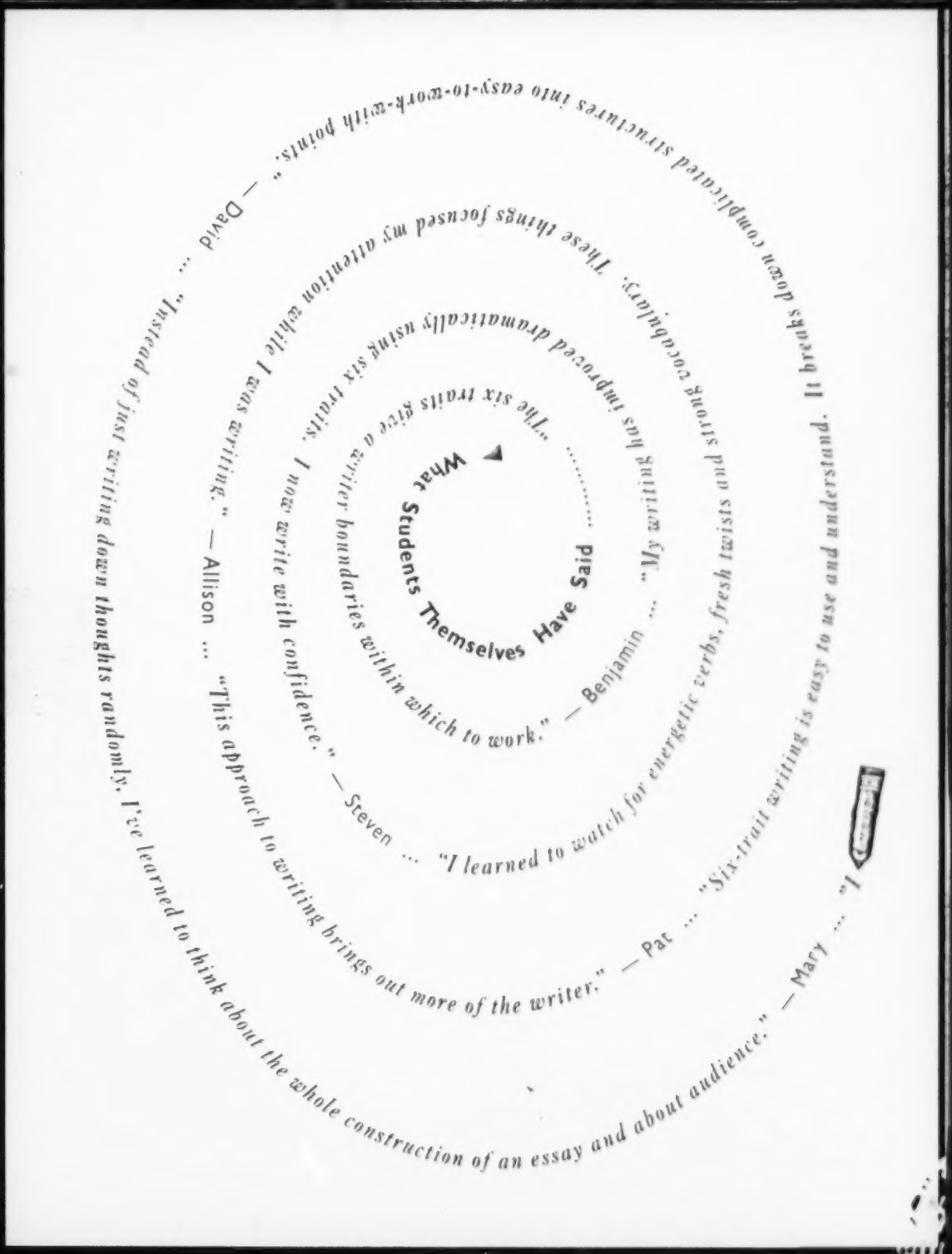
This is the most complete book to date on the 6-trait analytical writing model. Its theme is "assessing to learn," and it is written to help teachers take students to new heights of proficiency in writing and revising by showing them how to assess their own work and that of others. It includes an updated version of the 6-trait scoring guide, a student friendly guide, a brand new version designed especially for research writing, and guidelines for primary writers, too. Special features include *numerous* student papers to read and score—with suggested scores and an explanation provided for each sample; many teaching tips relating to drafting, revising and editing; checklists for both students and parents to use; and scenarios that take readers inside 6-trait classrooms. Written in a conversational, easy-to-read style. Phone orders: 1-800-822-6339.

Spandel, Vicki. 1996. Seeing With New Eyes, 3rd edition. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. 293 pages.

The primary complement to Creating Writers. This version is specially written for K-3 teachers, but includes numerous ideas parents can use at home, too. The book features numerous sample papers, complete with discussion; continuums showing development of writing/reading skills over time; thoughts on revision, editing and process writing, primary style; many tips for using reading to teach writing—recommended books are listed; ideas for writing in five modes (more than stories); thoughts on portfolios; and much more. This is a highly practical text, one which many parents have found useful. Order by phone: 503-275-9519.

Stiggins, Richard and Tanis Knight. But Are They Learning? A Commonsense Parents' Guide to Assessment and Grading in Schools. 1997. Portland: Assessment Training Institute. 88 pages. ISBN: 0-9655101-1-5.

A practical, down-to-earth guide to quality assessment that prompts parents to ask important questions about the ways in which their students are being assessed. This brief, easy-to-read book invites parents to become partners in the assessment process. To order: 1-800-480-3060.


What Students Themselves Have Said
"The six traits give a writer boundaries within which to work." — Benjamin ... "My writing has improved dramatically using six traits. I now write with confidence." — Steven ... "I learned to watch for energetic verbs, fresh twists and strong vocabulary. These things focused my attention while I was writing." — Allison ... "This approach to writing brings out more of the writer." — Pat ... "Six-trait writing is easy to use and understand. It breaks down complicated structures into easy-to-work-with points." — David ... "Instead of just writing down thoughts randomly, I've learned to think about the whole construction of an essay and about audience." — Mary ... "I

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